

BUDHAN



**The Denotified & Nomadic Tribes Rights Action Group Newsletter
September-December 2000 & January-March 2001**

Budhan : The Denotified & Nomadic Tribes Rights Action Group Newsletter

Editor :

G.N.DEVY

Editorial Advisors :

MAHASVETA DEVI

LAXMAN GAIKWAD

Published by :

DNT RIGHTS ACTION GROUP, 6 United Avenue, Near Dinesh Mills, Vadodara - 390 007

Telephone : (0265) 331130 E-mail : bhasha@bnpl.com

Printed at :

Shivam Offset, Vadodara

Vol. III, No. 4, September-December 2000 & January-March 2001

Annual Subscription :

Rs. 200/- in India

Rs. 30/- for single issue, Rs. 60/- for this issue

U.S. \$ 50 for subscribers outside India

Address for Correspondence :

6 United Avenue, Near Dinesh Mills, Vadodara - 390 007

Telephone : (0265) 331130 Email : bhasha@bnpl.com

This Newsletter is named after Budhan Sabar, a tribal belonging to the 'denotified' Kheria Sabar community of West Bengal, who was brutally killed in February 1998.

Some Aboriginal Tribes

A. Aiyappan

From *The Report on the Socio-economic Conditions of the Aboriginal Tribes of the Province of Madras, Chapter XI, 'Criminal Tribes'*.

Note : The author was Secretary, Aboriginal Tribes Welfare Enquiry Committee

Yenadi and Irula

The name Yenadi is a corruption of Einar, the name by which the inhabitants of the palai regions were distinguished in ancient times. The names Irulan, Villian, Vedan and Malayan are also used by the Tamil-speaking members of this tribe. They inhabit the regions below the Eastern Ghats and along the coast from Guntur to South Arcot.

The characteristic features of an Yenadi or Irula are prominent cheek bones, a pointed chin, scanty hair on the face and the body, a tendency to curls of the hair on the head and a platyrrhine nose. They are feeble in physique with soft and flabby muscles. A tradition has grown associating the Yenadi with the Pulicat Lake area as his original home. The most miserable sections of this tribe live in the jungles of Pulicat. They do some fishing. Based on this tradition, a foolish suggestion has been made that the Yenadis are negritos from the Malay Peninsula or Africa or Australia who were ship-wrecked on these shores. Even a connexion with the Yanans of North California has been suggested !

The main homelands of this tribe are the modern Nellore, Chittoor and Chingleput districts. More strictly, it may be restricted to the Kalahasti, Karvetnagar and Kambakkam Hills, and to the jungles of the Pulicat Lake. It is in this restricted area that you find the typical Yenadi or Irula called Adavi Yenadi. Further up in Nellore, their jungle characteristics get toned down gradually to two distinct and opposing types. The first is the 'Manchi' Yenadis or the 'good' Yenadis who, through long domestic service in the homes of the upper classes, have lost all the jungle characteristics. They are cooks and 'Khasas', and even Brahmins and Reddis employ them. Today, one can distinguish a 'Nellore' type, irrespective of caste, and the 'Manchi Yenadi' belongs to that type. The second is the miserable Challa Yenadi who lives on the refuse of the table in Nellore and who also does scavenging work in Nellore, Tenali and other municipalities. Adavi or jungle Yenadis have spread into the villages where they live in scattered huts in topes and fields as watchmen. Further north in the Godavari and Vizagapatam districts, there are a

scattered few of this tribe passing under the name of Nakkalas, the appellation indicating their snaring the jackal and eating its flesh. Of Adavi Yenadis, a section catches frogs and are called Kappala Yenadis. All these Yenadis worship 'Chenchu Devata,' and in their ballads and dramas they call themselves Chenchus. The Yenadis enact their own drama which is called Chenchu Nataka.

They follow the Chenchu method for finding out the midday, the Abhijit muhurtam; only, not having the arrows of the Chenchu, they plant a stick and watch for the disappearance of its shadow. The sex life of the Yenadi is similar to that of the Chenchu.

The Yenadi does not eat beef, but is very fond of the field rats and fish.

The Adavi Yenadis manufacture charcoal. To the south of the Suvarnamukhi river, where the Aruva Nadu of Tamil country begins, the tribe extends under its Tamil name of Irula into Chingleput, North Arcot and South Arcot districts. The Irula has acquired some Tamil habits and would now disclaim all connexion with the Yenadi. Chiefly, the Irula despises the frog-eating of the Yenadi and considers all Yenadis inferior to him. They have a tradition that after the Yuga pralayam or the deluge, Villiar or Irular, Vedar and Malayar who were all descendants of a Rishi under a curse, were living in a nude state, men wearing skins and women stitched leaves, and eating roots, fruits and honey. A certain Mala Rishi, sometimes mentioned as Valmiki, took pity on them seeing their helplessness against wild beasts and lived with them for a time. He mixed freely with their women and several children were born. The Rishi advised them to worship 'Kanniamma', the virgin goddess. Several other Rishis also lived in their midst and were responsible for other new castes. The Yenadi is one such caste. The original Irular were averse to taking cooked rice even when gratuitously offered. The Yenadi broke the rule, came to the plains, began eating cooked rice and imitating plains people. One can see in this story the transition from a Kurinji (hill) and Mullai (forest) life to the life of a Palai (desert). The section called Yenadi were evidently the first to suffer from their Mullai degenerating into Palai and were, therefore, called Einar. The others who stuck to the hills and forests a while longer could look down upon them. Today, however, Irula, Villia, Veda or Malaya are in the same state as the Yenadi. All of them are Einar.

In the Chenchu Nataka, Kannappa Nayanar and Enadi Nayanar, the Saiva Saints, are claimed by the Irulas as of their caste. In the Chenchu Nataka, again, they claim also Ekalavia of the Mahabharata.

The Irular worship Kanniamma in addition to Chenchu Devi. The virgin goddess may be a form of Chenchlita. Any way, the single virgin has now been multiplied into seven virgins and the Sapta Kanyas are worshipped. The Kannimar-worship is not unknown to other Tamil castes. Generally, the Kannimar temples are in forests near a stream. The Kannimar odai or virgins' brook near Salem is a popular resort for picnics. The Kannimar are represented by oil lamps (earthen ware) placed under the Bandari plant which is sacred and the Irula will not let a Pariah or an Yenadi see them. He despises the Yenadi so much as an outcast.

The Irula and the Yenadi, like the Kurumbar, find occasion for worship during the Choula or first head-shaving of children. On such occasions all children under ten years of age are collected and the maternal uncle of each child cuts off one lock of hair and ties it to the ravi tree (*Ficus religiosa*). Like the Kurumba, they worship their ancestors.

The Irula has the same partiality for rats as the Yenadi.

Anthropometric measurements show a definite commonness among the Sholaga, the Irula of Nilgiris, the Irula of the East Coast and the Urali. The last two bear the signs of greater contact with plainsmen. Marriage among the Yenadi-Irular is purely by mutual consent. The ceremony is not indispensable although it is becoming fashionable nowadays. Their code of morality is very low. A man may take several women at a time, but a woman may take only one man at a time. Divorce is easy and frequent.

When a girl attains puberty, she is placed in a separate hut erected then and there for eight days. A stick of the Nur vomica plant is placed inside the hut to ward off evil spirits. On the ninth day, the girl bathes and is free from pollution. The hut is burnt down.

Pollution is observed after child birth. For the first three days after delivery the mother is fed on the tender leaf of the date palm; later she is given rice. Margosa leaves and the knife used for cutting the umbilical cord are kept under the child's head for six days. A net is hung in the doorway of the hut to ward off evil spirits. The mother bathes on the tenth day. The Yenadis are soothsayers. Like the Nilgiri Kurumbar, they pretend to interpose between man and god. The soothsayer goes through a training under experts. All castes once resorted to the Yenadi soothsayer. The Yenadi is fond of singing and he gives his predictions in songs.

The Yenadis are good divers. They are keen on fishing. They are clever at catching cobras. They are fearless in this matter as also when they swing with the help of a rope of plaited bamboo some 200 feet from a precipice in order to gather honey. The honey collection by the Yenadi is a very skilful affair. There is one interesting feature of this dangerous descent for the honey. The Yenadi insists on his wife's brother being in charge of the rope on which he swings. We have seen that the Kadar of the Anamalais has an even better device for ensuring his safety. He carries the wife of the man on to the top with him in the swing. The Irula, Villia, Veda or Yenadi has a reputation for knowledge of some medicinal roots and herbs. In fact, the soothsayer secures the confidence of his clients by holding burning cinders in his hands before he begins his oracular demonstrations. His ancestors, it is claimed, could put their hand into boiling rice and stir it. It is remarkable that in Sreeharikota which is notorious for elephantiasis the Yenadi alone is free from it. They generally bury their dead and their funeral rites resemble those of Hindus. Some cremate also. They worship other Hindu gods too. They wear caste-marks chiefly the Vaishnava namam.

This well-known tribe is a large one and may really number a few lakhs. Near the hills and jungles they are conspicuous as charcoal producers and forest coolies. They bear the marks that distinguish them from every other community. Their economic condition is deplorable and their ways are, therefore, primitive though socially they have a status and are a touchable caste. The census enumerators omitted them from the list of tribes since 1901. In 1881 and 1891, they were returned with totals of 66,099 and 88,988, respectively. In 1941, Villians of Chingleput were mentioned as a tribe but only a small number, 28, was shown. The Villians are really thousands in number in Chingleput district alone and the census figures are evidently a mistake. It is, however, gratifying that the tribe has got included under one of its sectional names. The Villiar Sanghams in Chingleput district recognize the oneness of the Irula, Yenadi, Veda and Villia, and through their good offices, the tribe shows signs of rising above sectional jealousies and making a united demand for recognition of their miserable condition by the Government.

The Government have not been unaware of the existence of this tribe. In this miserable palai life, the Yenadi easily becomes a tool in the hands of crime organizers from among the upper classes. The Yenadi seeking the refuse of the table or a watcher's job in a field or a tope on a wage of Rs. 10 per annum was only too easily tempted to steal, burgle and even dacoit when some upper class man put him on to it promising to feed him, his wife and children. If the Yenadi went to jail, even then, his wife would be looked after. The process was similar to the one by which the Korava or Erukala became a criminal tribe with the difference that the Yenadi lacked the skill of the Erukala and was always clumsy. In fact, the famished wretch would eat all the eatable in the house he burgles and defecate there and leave other signs of his handiwork which the police very soon learnt to classify as the Yenadi mode. The Yenadi confesses easily but often saves his patron, the receiver. The tribe was notified under the Criminal Tribes Act. They are notified under the names of Nakkalas and Yenadis. But under the latter name many Irulas and Villias also have been registered. In this matter, at least, the oneness of the tribe has been recognized!

Since the introduction of the Panchayat Scheme and the setting up of Palemis, Yenadi crime in the Chittoor district has nearly disappeared and this is influencing the neighbouring areas of Chingleput and Nellore also.

Large numbers of the tribe are no longer in a stage of transition. They have definitely become plainmen and part of the main body of Hindus. It is so in the Nellore and Guntur districts. The Manchi Yenadis of these districts are no more Einar. They are coveted domestic servants and have a place in society along with other Hindu castes. The Challa Yenadi who eats anything and does scavenging is very much like a depressed class and will deserve to be treated as such.

The Yenadis of Chittoor, the adjacent Venkatagiri forests, the neighbourhood of the Kambakkam Hills in the Chingleput district, the Gudiyatham area of North Arcot, and the Gingee area of South Arcot are of the Adavi type and are still in a transitional stage. Similarly also are the Yenadis of the Pulicat Lake area and the Irulars who extend along the coast as far south as Porto Novo in the South Arcot district.

The Adavi type are already the subjects of the Chittoor Yenadi Reclamation Scheme which was commenced in 1935. It is run by the police. It was also initiated by the Police, a fact which may seem curious to persons who are not quite conversant with the Madras Police, its personnel and its methods with crime and criminals. It is not known to many that the Criminal Tribes Act and its provisions were as "galling" to the Police who had to administer it as to the social worker, politician or other sympathiser. Even in the twenties, the Police who have greater knowledge of the environmental factors around the criminal tribe members began paying attention to these factors and attempts were made to instil a family sense, if not a tribal sense, into the members. Ideas of reclamation without internment in a settlement under section 16 of the Criminal Tribes Act were conceived quite early and the present Siddhapuram Settlement began that way. A tribe, notorious as the Donga Woddars, were invited to settle down voluntarily on the fertile acres below the Siddhapuram tank in the Kurnool district. An Inspector of Police made it his life's work. The voluntary settlement made a bid to become a model for rural reconstruction work. Agriculture prospered and cottage industries thrived. In 1930, a great step towards reformation and ultimate emancipation was taken when the police put the

restrictive order in abeyance in respect of members who showed promise of good behaviour. In 1935, in the district of Chittoor, a further step was taken, and this was a large one, when the tribal self-respect was invoked through panchayats representative of a group of tribesmen. There were thousands of members on the registers and the total population of the notified tribes in the district was some tens of thousands. A census was taken and a panchayat and a Nayak elected. The Nayak's office was recognized by the Police, who spoke to the tribesmen through the Nayak and the panchayatdars. The scheme succeeded. The Nayak came to be recognized as their spokesman by the tribesmen. The Lambads and their natural Tandas, the Erukalas and others lived in villages, but the Yenadis were then living in a scattered way. They found it safe under the Panchayat Scheme to live near their Nayaks, and soon in every panchayat unit, the Yenadis began asking for huts and sites for huts near to the Nayak. This facilitated the building of Palems. When the Palems came about, there were 182 by the middle of 1937, the Police had another problem and that was the finding of remunerative occupations for the Palem-folk. It was realized that the Yenadis were children of the forest and, forests, therefore, suggested themselves as one natural resource that may be availed of. Attempts were made to do Kumri cultivation (shifting cultivation) in the forests, not in the destructive tribal way but agreeably with forest regeneration. Zamindars were approached and lands for cultivation secured. A minimum of 200 acres per Palem was secured where lands were available. In a Palem called Jayanti, 1200 acres were secured, and in Melachur, 500 acres. Jayanti, in 1941, produced paddy, cholam, ragi, chillies and tobacco. Charcoal burning, the traditional occupation of the Yenadis, was taken up. The contractors who had been paying the Yenadi were eliminated. Schools were started; and carding, spinning and weaving introduced. The Yenadi carding and spinning attained a great standard. The Andhra All-India Spinners' Association had helped in this. The Yenadi weavers at Kalhasti earned good wages. Like most good things, the scheme appears to have languished, partly due to preoccupation in other matters on the part of local officers and partly due to a feeling among some Police officers that the working of the scheme is outside the province of normal Police work. Policemen who hold this view are giving up their own case. The Police of a land should be the supremest nation-building agency. The City Superintendent of Police in ancient Hindu drama was called a Nagaraka from which 'Nagarakala' meaning 'civilization' comes.

However, the plight of the Yenadis of Chittoor under the Reclamation Scheme is a sorry one. The foundations there including charcoal burning have decayed. The Charkas are plied only by a few. The lands allotted by the Zamindar have not yet been brought under the plough completely, and the Zamindars are rightly grumbling about it. They assigned the lands to Yenadis on easy terms in preference to villagers. They expected the lands to be cultivated to pay them the agreed rents. In the year just passing, there has been a revival of interest in the Yenadi reclamation on the part of the District Police who have unfortunately and quite surprisingly been greatly discouraged by almost every one of their proposals being turned down by the Government.

A remedy of the present state of affairs is urgently needed. Firstly, the lands assigned may be acquired by Government. Secondly, spinning and weaving should be revived. Thirdly, the Forest Department should allot coupes to the Yenadis through the Nayakas or the Reclamation Officer. Fourthly, several proposals for wells, schools, etc., made by the District Superintendent

of Police, Chittoor, in the past years have been turned down as "absolutely" non-essential. They should all be re-examined. For the rest, the measures suggested for this tribe as a whole as well as other tribes similarly placed are dealt with in Part I of this Report.

The Chittoor Yenadi Scheme may be extended to Chingleput, North Arcot, South Arcot and also such Adavi Yenadis as there are in Guntur and Nellore districts.

The Pulicat Yenadis present a problem of their own. The one curse they suffer from is malaria, against which measures must be taken at once. There is scope here and along the coast line down to Porto Novo for acquiring lands where the Yenadis may grow casuarina. In fact, they now work as coolies in these plantations. It is a paying occupation and will suit the Yenadi very much. As a coolie, he is poorly paid. Cashewnut can also be grown.

Fishing in the Pulicat Lake is of great potentialities.

Korava

This tribe is also called "Koracha" and "Erukala" in the Telugu districts. In the Tamil districts, the name is Korava, but it is considered by many that "Kurava" is the name. The "r" is the trilled or the second of the two "r's" in the Tamil alphabet.

The Kuravar or Kunravar is the name by which the Kurunilam folk or hill people were called. The Kurava tradition connects them with Muruga, the Tamil Hero-God, through Valli, a Kurava girl whom he married. Muruga is the God of the hills, and his temples are usually on the hills. In the Telugu country where Vaishnavism has greater vogue, the hill shrines are generally those of Narasimha. The Korachas and Erukalas associate themselves with Narasimha.

In ancient days, there appear to have existed a Koranadu and a Koramandala. Koranadu sarees are known to be fashionable wear among Tamil ladies. Coromandel Coast is, perhaps, Koramandala Coast only. Korava is the name of one of the hill tribes in the Central Provinces. There is also a place called "Korea" in Upper India. The distant Korea or Cho-Sen in East Asia, till recently under the heels of Imperial Japan, is not too far to be thought of when we talk of this tribe. The Koreans, living as they do in the midst of Mongoloid peoples, ruled and oppressed by them for centuries, are yet different from them. In features, in character and in their speech, they are different from the Chinese, Japanese and Manchurians. And, looking at a picture of Koreans, one cannot help being struck by the Hindu features that are strikingly apparent in spite of the dress and other settings of a very different character.

It remains to mention the possible connexion with Kora meaning the "Sun". The Sun-religion had a high place in the East Coast and in Tamil Nad in ancient days. The Sun temple at Konarak, 50 miles east of Puri in Orissa, is a monument of a highly civilized community of Sun-worshippers. Konarak (Kuna Arka or the Sun of the East-rising Sun) had the Sun's temple and the Provinces around seem to have borne the names of the signs of the zodiac. Some of these names have survived even now in Chaitra-pura, Visakha-patna, Mithuna-pura, Kataka and Simhabhumi.

Whether they were Koravas or Kuravas, this tribe appears to have been once in a prosperous state. That a Nadu and a Mandala are named after them shows they might have been politically important too. They were carriers of trade, busily moving with their donkeys between the coasts and their interiors. They acquired sect names according to the commodity they traded

in. Their peregrinations gave them great knowledge of the several cities, towns and villages, and their trades gave them access to people of all classes and types. This seems to have been availed of by the rulers of the day and the Koravas were employed as an intelligence corps. The name Erukala that the Telugu section of the tribe bear is attributable to this, "Eruka" in Telugu meaning knowledge. Even in Tamil, the word "Kuru" means to tell and "Kuruva" may have become Kurava. Later on, Tippu Sultan of Mysore engaged them in his Espionage Corps. For his own purposes, he trained them to pilfer in the enemy's camps and rob them on the routes. The Kurava, with his disciplined caste organization, was able to systematize his criminality. Thereafter, when, with the advent of modern transport facilities and trade systems, the Korava's traditional occupation was gone, he resorted to thieving and robbing which is a fine art with him, studied as such from childhood.

The Koravas or Erukals talk a dialect of Tamil and are ethnically cousins of Tamils and Telugus of the plains though some writers have tried to class them as aboriginals.

The Koravas have been notified as criminal tribes under various names in the several districts. Their skill in burglaries, their daring in dacoities and the consummate manner in which they organize crimes through the length and breadth of the country are well-known. Hardy, industrious and intelligent, they applied all their talent and energy to a life of criminality. But it must be noted that the profits of their biggest hauls and greatest plunders went to enrich others only. The Korava was a mere tool. His was an organized community that had been reduced to live on its wits and compelled to wait on some patron of the villages and towns. It was a period in the country's history when rural economy was struggling to adjust itself to modernism. The Korava was a free element in this flux, but an element that would not easily coalesce or combine with others. At the same time, owing to kinship of language and race he could not stand out altogether like the Lambadi. He sought patrons in the villages among the tyrants and anti-social elements of that period who were themselves only victims of circumstances in this historic transition. The Korava used to the open air and the freedom of the trade routes chose the free booters' life which the patron helped owing to his own impotent strivings towards power. What is called the "Poligar spirit" prevailed.

The Korava was notified quite early under the Criminal Tribes Act. The severest provisions of the Act were applied to him. They were removed in thousands from their homelands in Rayalaseema and interned in the settlements in Nellore and Guntur districts. The American Baptist Mission and the Salvation Army undertook the management of the Kavali, Sitanagaram and Stuartpuram settlements. There was not available at that time a single Hindu organization to undertake the task. At Kavali, thousands perished in a few years behind the barbed wires. From there and from Sitanagaram, gangs of them would break out, march along the old familiar routes known to Policemen as the Erukala Batas (bata-route) to their ancestral homes where an erstwhile patron or a patron of their deceased ancestors would welcome them, however, clandestinely. They would hide in a neighbouring hill or jungle until the Police get scent and pursue them. They would, in the meanwhile, visit the tombs of their ancestors and perform "Shraddham". The settlement meanwhile would have telegraphed the usual "out of view list" and the Korava would know that the chase is on through every district he traverses. He is, however, thankful for the brief freedom and grateful to those in the villages that have shown kindness. He would express the gratitude by a few burglaries and dacoities. These

would sometimes be directed against the enemies of his patron. Invariably, the proceeds will go to the ones that have shown hospitality. The hosts, in course of time, would develop a taste for them and gradually learn to harbour the Korava with this motive only.

Often, the Korava would be the honoured guest and enjoy privileges even with the womenfolk. But the age of dacoities was ended with the advent of bus transport. Rural economy too had got settled; social values even in villages came to be determined on the Gandhian lines. The bright one of the village would not be a tyrant any more; he would wear khaddar and go to jail. The Korava too changed. The new creed ensnared him too and in Stuartpuram where the Salvation Army had proselytised for forty years, the revolt began and it was the revolt of peace. Erukula youths preached Gandhism for which the management punished them. They formed an Erukula Sangham and are editing a paper entitled 'Erukula'.

The tribe has come into its own. Naturally intelligent, gifted with a remarkable adaptability, they are fit to take their place with the main body of our population. But they need help and such help as a penitent wrong-doer merits from the wronged. The Korava must have land. He must have education given him free for another generation.

Emancipation from the Criminal Tribes Act is deserved and due in the present state of the tribe and the conditions prevalent in the Province. But the freedom will be worthless and may even be dangerous if the Korava is not adequately provided for settling down as a good citizen. A settler in Sitanagaram seemed very sad when he heard the Chairman of the Committee proclaim that the Criminal Tribes Act will be abolished. Almost in tears, he asked, "What is to become of us then?" In the settlements they have some possessions too - some of them - and their fear is that with the abolition of the Criminal Tribes Act, the settlement will be wound up and they sent out to live on their wits again in the wide world. The tribesmen honestly feel that they will not have their emancipation on such terms.

At Sitanagaram and Stuartpuram which are Erukula settlements many families can settle down on land. At Sitanagaram, the quarries provide a substantial subsidiary income. At Stuartpuram, about 800 acres of land have already been assigned. Erukula villages have come up here. There is much more land available and irrigational facilities are available and can be extended. Round about Kavali and Bitragunta vast tracts of land are available and Erukula colonies can be established here. The Erukulas really belong to Rayalaseema but several generations have been born in these eastern districts since their transportation from their homelands into the settlements. They have got accustomed to these areas, to the language and the manners. They now prefer to remain where they are. In the west, the Korachas, who had gone back to their homelands on release from settlements survive in small numbers in several places. In some cases, their lands have been taken away during their stay in the settlements. Restoration must be done in such cases. In the case of others, lands must be provided afresh now. In Tanakal area of the Anantapur district, there is a regular clamour for lands. Land is available almost everywhere, but in the first three or four years, the Korava must be helped with bulls, implements, seeds, etc.

Lambadi

The Lambadis are seen in all the upland areas in the Telugu and Kannada Provinces. They are known also as Sugalis and Brinjaris. The three names Lambadi, Sugali and Brinjari are derived respectively from lavana (salt), su-gwala (good cowherd) and Banijar (traders). They are also sometimes called Gohurs but this is not a common name. The Brinjari division of this tribe living in the Nizam's Dominions is called Vadatya or Northern Division. They are divided into four main classes. These are the Vadatya above mentioned, Chavan, Panchar and Bhutya classes. The last three were descendants of three sons of an ancestor called Mola who, with his brother Mota, was a descendant of Sugriva of the Ramayana! Mota's progeny became the Laban, Gurjera and Marwadi clans. There are Gotrams within each of the four classes and the names of Gotras in the Vadatya class show that they were later immigrants from Central India, e.g., Ajmairi. These classes intermarry with one another and a feud between the Vadatyas and Bhutyas is now forgotten. The Bhutyas are the principal class in Rayalaseema where this tribe exists in large numbers. All these come under the generic term Lamadi. They speak a dialect of the Cutchi group. It is a facile language and sounds well in spite of the inevitable admixture of Kannada, Telugu and Tamil words.

In olden days, this tribe was engaged in the carrying trade. The Lambadis were carrying salt from the coast and grains from inland. The Banjaras carried other goods of commerce. The Sugalis settled down in suitable pastures on these routes and bred the cattle that served as pack bullocks for the tribe. Their trade was destroyed with the introduction of other means of transport. The Lambadi is now trying to settle down to cultivation but there is not much good land left. During the transition from pastoral life and life as itinerant traders to agriculture and other means of livelihood, the Lambadi took to crime too and in some districts came to be notified under the Criminal Tribes Act.

The Lambadis are a strong and virile race. The men have adopted the regional dress of Kannada or Telugu area but the women retain their picturesque garments in the making of which they spend a lot of time and energy. They also wear various jewels characteristic of the tribe, the horn bangles, the peculiarly shaped anklets and the gurikis. Reformers have attempted to make the Lambadi women give up her heavy unwashable dress and take to the ordinary sari. They have met with little success. It seems unwise to interfere with it on moral as well as aesthetic grounds.

The sex life among the Lambadis is healthy. They have a high code of morality. Widows cannot re-marry, but may live with anyone. No illegitimacy attaches to the children of such unions. Before the widow contracts such union, her children, if any, are separately provided for by a gift of buffaloes, etc. The Lambadi woman is never sick or sorry. She is hard working, strong, always bold and cheerful. They sing and dance most prettily. The songs are in their language and in praise of Krishna, the Lord of Cows. They always live in villages of their own which they call Tanda. They do not mix with other communities.

They are found in large numbers, chiefly in the uplands of Chittoor, Anantapur and Bellary. They are also found on the Erramalais near Panyam and at Diguva Metta in the Kurnool district, in the western taluks of Guntur and also in the uplands of the Krishna and West Godavari districts. In the south, they extend from the Palmaner plateau of Chittoor into North Arcot and Salem.

They are good with their cattle. At Panyam, they actually breed good cattle now. They generally bring the cattle of the plains up to the hills for grazing during the off-season. They are said to be quite honest in this business and receive a fair remuneration from the plainsmen.

The Lambadis are growing keen on education. In Bellary and Chittoor they are asking for schools. Some educated Lambadis of Bellary have undertaken great social work among their kinsmen, and an awakening is noticeable. In and around Madanapalle, efforts of sociologists and sympathisers have done some good.

The problem of the Lambadis can be stated as under :-

They have an aptitude for agriculture and want lands for cultivation. They are a pastoral community and require pastures and other facilities towards remunerative dairy farming and cattle breeding.

The children must be taught in their own language. It is now an unwritten language but it is possible to write it in the Nagari or Telugu script and text-books for primary schools can be prepared. It is a language which deserves to be preserved.

They have a weakness for arrack which they always manage to distil illicitly.

Kallar and Maravar

The Kallars and Maravars of the south are notified under the Criminal Tribes Act. They belong to a group of three very proud communities in Tamil Nad, who style themselves as the Mukkulattar or the 'three clans'. The three are Kallar, Maravar and Agambadiyar.

Rajas and Zamindars belonging to these clans exist. There have also been scholars and saints among them. The tribesmen resent being called tribes. Verily, the land of the Maravas to-day is a palai and appears to have been so for quite some centuries. The Kallar traditions trace them from the Pallavas. The Kallar has been connected with the Kurumba too.

Various accounts of these tribes have been written and the tribes are so well known and so much in the midst of plainsmen to-day that an account of their customs and manners will be redundant here. The facts to be noted for our purposes are :

- (1) that these are virile communities endowed with some conspicuous martial traits;
- (2) they are found in large numbers in certain taluks of Madura and Ramnad districts. The Kallars are 36 per cent of the population of Tirumangalam taluk, 20 per cent in Periyakulam, 18 per cent in Dindigul, 12 per cent in Nilakottai and 10 per cent in Palani. The Maravars predominate in the Ramnad district, especially in the Mudukulattur taluk;
- (3) the areas they occupy are more or less of the palai variety; and
- (4) they have been notorious for the palai mode of living i.e. robbery and theft.

With an improvement in irrigational facilities resulting naturally in a reclamation of the palai, the Melur taluk Kallars are reported to have settled down as good ryots. But in the other areas which have not been so fortunate Kallar crime has gone on unabated.

The application of the Criminal Tribes Act to batch after batch since 1914 has not reclaimed them. Nor has the immense expenditure of money and the energies of the huge police and other staffs to educate the Kallar through schools and co-operative societies been of any avail. The 'bee-keeping instructors' and 'poultry farms' could not make the Kallar Nadu flow with milk and honey. An attempt with textile weaving was a similar failure. The rural credit societies

have only resulted in the Kallars' lands being encumbered to an extent of nine lakhs of rupees in the Tirumangalam taluk alone, at an average of Rs. 100 per acre.

There cannot be a clearer case to show that all attempts at 'reclaiming' a tribe or community must be futile if the land they live on is not reclaimed beforehand. This point is very important in the immediate present. There is a proposal to extend the Periyar Project to the Tirumangalam taluk. This should be taken up at once. The only remedy is the conversion of these palai regions into cultivable lands as in Melur and Tirumangalam.

In the course of reclamation work under the Criminal Tribes Act, Kallar panchayats were set up, but the panchayats were merely agencies for helping the Police in controlling Kallar crime. The Kallar and the other public would have been the gainers had the panchayats been charged with more than the informer's task. The panchayats may now be availed of in the reconstruction of the Kallar and Maravar villages in a scheme of reclamation of all their lands.

A number of co-operative societies exist and they are almost all only credit societies. There are as many as 267 societies on paper, most of them being defunct or dormant.

A Kallar Common Fund has been a success with a lakh of rupees made up from donations by Kallars. It is administered by an elected committee with three Superintendents of Police and a Deputy Superintendent as ex-officio bearers. It really means that these officials are running it; it is, however, a good amount and may be useful for a future Kallar bank.

There are 256 elementary schools with nearly 15,000 pupils maintained for Kallars alone. Some 1,500 pupils are receiving higher education as boarders in various institutions. There are boarding homes for Kallars at Usilampatti and Melur. The Boy Scout Movement has been introduced.

The Kallars do not take to agriculture kindly. They love cattle; in fact, their cattle-lifting may be an indication of their respect for cattle. This feature rather agrees with their Pallava origin. Cattle-breeding and dairy-farming will probably be the most suitable occupation for them. There is a vast acreage of cultivable waste and more of the non-cultivable in the district. Regeneration of these areas into pastures and forests will be useful in more ways than one. In the Tirumangalam taluk alone there are some 11,000 acres of cultivable waste which is mostly black cotton soil. Cotton and groundnut will grow well here and where the soil may not lend itself to conversion into pastures, fodder cholam can be grown.

It is often said that with the repeal of the Criminal Tribes Act, Kallar crime will grow unchecked. But the fact is that Kallar crime continued to be high even when the Criminal Tribes Act was applied to them and even after the schools and co-operative societies were set up and bee-keeping instructors appointed. Recently, there have been signs of deterioration; attendance at schools has gone down; co-operative dues are recoverable only with difficulty and Kallar crime shows a tendency to increase. It is evident that the Kallar resents both the Criminal Tribes Act and the cossetting attempted to be done through the huge doles of the Kallar Reclamation Scheme. The wearer knows where the shoe pinches; if he does not, he at least can know whether the remedy has relieved him of the undefined pain. In this, the Kallar alone knows whether schools, etc. have relieved him of the need or the propensity for committing crimes. His answer being what it is, it is clear that the Kallar problem lies elsewhere than in the lack of elementary schools and short-term credit.

The educated few of the communities are now striving to reclaim their communities. The

All India Banjara Seva Sangh

Proceedings of the second joint meeting of National Executive Committee and Presidents of State and Mega City Branches of All India Banjara Seva Sangh (AIBSS) held at Maharashtra Sadan, Copernicus Marg, New Delhi on 20th August 2000.

As per urgent notice issued by AIBSS, dated 03-08-2000, for the Second NEC Meeting it was to be held in the 'Gurijada Conference Hall' of Andhra Pradesh Bhavan, Jaswant Singh Road, New Delhi, on 20-08-2000 at 10.00 a.m. Unfortunately, at an eleventh hour the management of A. P. Bhavan informed President, Shri Ranjit Naik on 19-08-2000, that AIBSS meeting cannot be held in the said Gurijada Conference Hall, A. P. Bhavan, as Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh was holding a conference of Chief Ministers of different States in the same hall. Therefore, we took the help of Shri Makhrum Pawar, Honourable Minister of Maharashtra State and his party colleague, Shri Rajesh Adhikari and hurriedly arranged the said meeting in a small Press Conference Hall at Maharashtra Sadan, where hardly 30 persons could sit. Whereas nearly 70 persons attended and squeezed in it uncomfortably.

The following NEC Members, Presidents of State and Mega City Branches, other invitee guests and some spectators attended the meeting:

1. Shri Ranjit Naik, President, AIBSS
2. Shri Makhrum Pawar, Working President of AIBSS and Honourable Minister of Maharashtra State
3. Shri Baburao Chowhan, Working President of AIBSS and Honourable Minister of Karnataka State
4. Shri (Dr.) M. Shankar Naik, President, Karnataka State Branch of AIBSS and Ex-Minister of Karnataka State.
5. Shri D. Ravindra Naik, Vice President of AIBSS, Ex-Minister of A.P. and Former Member of SC & ST Commission.
6. Shri K. G. Vanjara, General Secretary of AIBSS (Gujarat)
7. Shri C. S. Kalyan Naik, General Secretary, Karnatak State Branch of AIBSS
8. Prof. Abhaysingh Parmar, NEC Member of AIBSS and Gen. Secretary, H.P. State Branch of AIBSS
9. Shri Uttamsingh Chowhan (Lalitpur, U.P.) General Secretary, AIBSS
10. Shri Navalsingh Panwar, (Indore, M.P.) NEC Member
11. Shri Shrawansingh Rathod, President, Madhya Pradesh State Branch of AIBSS
12. Shri K. B. Jadhav, President, Maharashtra State Branch of AIBSS
13. Shri Shankar Jadhav, General Secretary of AIBSS (Mumbai)

14. Shri T. Kishan Singh, President, Andhra Pradesh State Branch of AIBSS
15. Shri Madan Singh Chowhan, President, Rajasthan State Branch of AIBSS

The Highlights and Main Decisions of the Deliberation are as below :

Shri Ranjit Naik, President of Sangh, gave a brief report on the activities of the Sangh since First National Executive Committee (NEC) Meeting held on 9th and 10th March, 1999, at New Delhi. Among them he stressed that a historical event took place by holding the First General Council Meeting (after the fresh registration of AIBSS), at Gandhi Nagar, on 25th and 26th December, 1999. It was the most memorable event in the life and 47 years history of AIBSS, such a gathering of full quorum of General Council Members, representing all the State and Mega City Branches. The entire expenditure, management and socio-cultural and organisational works were managed and footed the bills by Shri D. G. Vanjara, IPS, Shri K. G. Vanjara, Personal Secretary to Social Welfare Minister, and Team of their workers from Gujarat State Banjaras.

President of Sangh appealed to all NEC Members and Presidents of Branch present to set-up district, Taluka/Tahasil/Mandal and Village/Tanda branches and complete the organisational set-ups in their respective States and Mega Cities, on top priorities. Then to carry out all types of membership drives intensively, as laid down in the registered Constitution of Sangh and to collect donations to raise funds.

Then Shri Ranjit Naik, explained the main purpose of this meeting, that was, "To get the inclusion of Banjaras of left off States (Balance States) in the list of Scheduled Tribes of the Constitution of India". To achieve this objective, AIBSS has adopted five approaches and the same should be done simultaneously. He further explained in detail on the pros and cons, repercussions, benefits and risks involved in each of the alternate approaches. But he said that we have no other choice than fighting for our rights and causes. No risks - No gains. If we do not do so, our enemies will try to snatch away whatever rights and benefits we are presently enjoying in some States. Therefore he appealed to the participant leaders and delegates that they should seriously apply their minds, understand socio-political intricacies, actions, reactions, counteractions of our adversaries of those communities who are sitting pretty in the compartments of SCs and STs and enjoying its fruits for the last 52 years and now they are resourceful, socially, politically, financially and educationally advanced enough to protect their interests. Therefore we have got to take well considered and responsible decisions in this meeting as the time is short and a golden opportunity has come to achieve our long pending demand of bringing Banjaras of those left off States in the list of ST, due to appointment of National Commission to Review the Working of Constitution, under the Chairmanship of Justice Venkatachallaiah, by the present NDA Government.

The Supreme Court Advocate, Shri H. Devarajan was introduced to the audience by Shri Ranjit Naik who appealed to him to explain the approach to the legal forums at different levels and times, in the form of Writ Petition to different State High Courts and ultimately to the Supreme Court of India. In which Shri K. G. Vanjara, General Secretary, AIBSSW, said that approaching legal forums should be made as a last resort. Not to jump immediately. Instead he suggested that we should try simultaneously four other approaches/options. Among them foremost should be getting the recommendation of each State for the inclusion of

Banjaras in the list of ST as a main Tribe along with its Synonyms in respective States, where Banjara population is existing and are in none of the lists of SC or ST. Shri K. G. Vanjara particularly stressed upon having an approach of low profile, instead of making loud declarations with blah-blah noise, in public forums and in the media, which will unnecessarily awaken and provoke our adversaries. These gimmick, stunts, political short cuts and publicity will spoil our strong and good case.

He gave a complimentary remarks about Sangh's President, Shri Ranjit Naik and on his systematic working, voluminous paper works done within these two years and the way he has created awareness amongst country's Banjaras, brought the unity amongst them and developed the organisational structure of AIBSS on sound footings, systematically, democratically with consensus opinions and has institutionalised the organisation. The amount of paper works, publications, guidelines and properly circulating them all over India to important leaders and workers of our 25 Branches. That too in a well studied and sensible write-ups, which has never happened in the past 47 years history of AIBSS movement. By these efforts of our National President, that now Banjaras of the country have kindled a feeling that there is a correct leadership at National level with credibility and has programme to revolutionise for a social movement of Banjaras. People are gradually rallying behind AIBSS with solidarity. We are optimistic that within a period of another couple of years AIBSS will become monolithic single body of country's Banjaras, similar to that of any National Political Party of the country.

The same echo was expressed by Shri Surjanlal Pawar, President Delhi State Branch of AIBSS, Shri Uttamsingh Chowhan, (UP), General Secretary, AIBSS, Shri Makhan Singhji Rathod, President, Chandigarh U. T. Branch, Shri (Dr.) M. Shankar Naik, President, Karnataka State Branch of AIBSS, Shri Sundarlal Muchal, President, Punjab State Branch of AIBSS, Shri Abhaysingh Parmar, NEC Member and General Secretary of Himachal Pradesh State Branch of AIBSS, Shri Ranbirsingh, Vice President of U.P. State Branch of AIBSS and Shri Roshanlal Rathod, General Secretary of AIBSS.

Advocate Shri H. Devarajan, further explained to the gathering that before we think of good and valid points, from our Sangh's point of view, for filing writ petitions, in those State High Courts, where Banjaras are neither in SC nor ST list, we have got to apply our minds and find out what are those law points, as well as historical and anthropological findings, facts and references from different commissions appointed by Govt. of India time to time, as well as different orders of Govt. of India and also on time to time Constitutional amendments in Article 341 and 342 carried out by Parliament and to study the different Judgements of High Courts and Supreme Courts in respect of Article 341 and 342 for SCs and STs. Study them carefully, explore whether these evidences and documents are favourable OR unfavourable to our case. Then only we will approach legal forums. As an Advocate, he said, he will take all precautions, find out legal, procedural and other factual evidences, also refer to different judgements in different High Courts and Supreme Court in respect of Challenging SC, ST lists on the points of including OR excluding a community in SC and ST. He will come back to NEC with a detail noting for further discussion in all aspects and take the Sangh into full confidence, then only go for filing writ petitions as per Sangh's decision and advice.

Since we cannot directly jump for filing writ petitions in Supreme Court under Article 32 of the Constitution of India. Therefore we have to file initially, the writ petition in different High

Courts. Then make a prayer to SC. of India to call all the Writ Petitions pending in different High Courts filed by different branches of AIBSS and take the decision as the subject matter is one and same and pertaining to one and the same community, Banjaras of the country. To do all these spade works, of collecting different references, evidences and drafting writ petitions, he advised to select a compact team of educated, knowledgeable and who have legal knowledge and interest to work. Also to take some expert people from different disciplines. So that they can meet very often and interact with Advocate Shri H. Devarajan, to finalise the draft of writ petition.

Legal/Experts Committee of AIBSS

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|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Shri H. Devarajan | 9. Shri Sarveshwar Naik |
| 2. Shri Ranjit Naik | 10. Shri Amarsingh Tilawat |
| 3. Shri Abhaysingh Parmar | 11. Shri Manohar Ainapur |
| 4. Dr. M. Shankar Naik | 12. Shri Kalyan Naik |
| 5. Shri K.G. Vanjara | 13. Shri Roshanlal Rathod |
| 6. Shri D. Ravindra Naik | 14. Shri Madansingh Chowhan |
| 7. Shri Uttamsingh Chowhan | 15. Shri Shrawansingh Rathod |
| 8. Shri Sundarlal Muchal | |

Shri Devarajan further stressed that this process will take a long time and will cause quite a good amount of expenditure. At the same time he further clarified that the Sangh's other four approaches suggested by the President of AIBSS, can go simultaneously (not necessarily to attempt each approach one by one) and in the mean time we should be ready with our gun powder dry for approaching legal forums. Because by any eventuality the other four approaches fails, then we are left with no other choice than approaching all possible legal forums, as the last resort. This has been unanimously agreed by all the participants.

On the approach of legal forums, Advocate Shri H. Devarajan answered the doubts and the queries raised by the following participants and satisfied them.

1. Shri K. G. Vanjara (Gujarat), General Secretary AIBSS
2. Shri Uttamsingh Chowhan, (UP), General Secretary AIBSS
3. Dr. M. Shankar Naik, (Karnataka), President, Karnataka Branch of AIBSS
4. Shri Sundarlal Muchal, (Punjab), President Punjab Branch of AIBSS
5. Shri D. Ravindra Naik, (AP), Vice President, AIBSS
6. Shri Makhansingh Rathod, (Punjab), Vice President, AIBSS
7. Shri Swaroop Singh Nayak, a Honourable Guest from U. P. State
8. Shri Raju Naik, President, Mumbai Mega City
9. Shri Roshanlal Rathod, General Secretary, AIBSS

Then the following other four options were discussed partly in the morning session and more in detail in the afternoon session between 2.30 pm and 5.30 p.m. In the meantime, Shri Makhram Pawar, Honourable Minister of Maharashtra State and working president AIBSS arrived in the meeting hall by 12.30 p.m. He spoke, in general from 1.00 p.m. to 1.30 p.m., on different approaches in achieving our main objectives for the inclusion of Banjaras in the list of S.T.

In the morning session Shri Makhramji Pawar stressed one important point that the Sangh should explore and find out the solution for giving a symbol for identifying Banjaras amongst the general crowd. He said in good olden days we had colourful, peculiar and outstanding costumes and ornaments for men and more for women to identify ourselves. Second symbol of our identification was Banajara Boli (Gor-Boli), a single dialect spoken throughout the country and third symbol was Banjara Tanda, a typical camp of our own. Since all these are gradually weaning away, due to modernization, education, technological and scientific developments, electronic media in the form of TV reaching to every nook and corner of the country, industrialization and thus urbanization of Banjaras for their livelihood, etc. Which are natural phenomena and therefore nobody can stop that process of progress in modern context. Therefore, we have to find out some identifiable symbol which should be suitable to men and women, palatable and convenient to put on to all, educated, uneducated and modern minded people.

After Shri Pawar's speech in the morning session, the meeting was adjourned for the lunch, between 1.30 pm to 2.30 pm. A buffet lunch was served by AIBSS.

Afternoon Second Session, between 2.30 pm and 5.30 pm

In the afternoon session all the five options were exhaustively discussed, considering all the pros and cons on them, by one and all the National Executive Committee Members, special invitees, State and Mega City Branch Presidents and other office bearers. Even some honorary guests participated in the deliberations. Most of the discussions were good, cordial, productive and positive with full of spirit and enthusiasm. Finally it was concluded that each option should be thoroughly discussed, explored and finally it was concluded that all efforts should be made to achieve our main objective, through each of the five options and approaches. The priorities were decided on each option by the participants and were finally resolved as below:

Approach - I

Approaching Justice Venkatachali National Commission to Review the working of constitution of India (NCRWC). This approach has already been started by AIBSS with all the documentary evidences and possible ways. However each State Branch should see that their respective State Governments send its recommendations to Govt. of India and a copy of Justice Venkatachali Commission. In this regard AIBSS has already sent the circulars to Branches. All Branches should act upon them, immediately.

Approach - II

By approaching the present National Democratic Alliance (NDA) Government at the Centre simultaneously. For which each state unit along with NEC members of respective States should meet the Governor, Chief Ministers, Social Welfare Minister and other elected representatives of each State (particularly MPs) and to bring pressure on them to recommend to Government of India, for the inclusion of Banjaras as a main tribe along with other Synonyms of Banjaras of respective states, as shown in the table (A) enclosed to our main memorandums submitted by AIBSS and State units to NCRWC. This is an important work to be done by each of state and mega city branches. Without which nothing will effectively work. Therefore, those branches/ states where Banjaras are in none of the lists and want to bring them in the

lists of Scheduled Tribes, then it is your responsibility, to put sincere efforts, work hard and persuade your State Govt. for recommending your state case and send it to Govt. of India. For this purpose, if your branch wants help, presence of President and other office bearers of AIBSS, to meet your stte Governor and Chief Ministers, etc. You are advised that without any hesitation you should call us at State Head Quarters, if possible by fixing prior appointment with these VIPs.

Please also note that all this has to be done within these three to four months period. Because these issues are actively considered by NDA Govt. at the Centre as well as NCRWC. There is no time left on this fateful decision on Banjaras and other such left off extreme backward communities and weaker sections. Here lays the test to prove that you are a correct representative leader of your State Banjaras.

During the course of the above discussion, Shri D. Ravindra Naik, had put a suggestion that the English language version of 'All India Banjara Seva Sangh (AIBSS)', should also be translated in Hindi language version, as 'Akhil Bharatiya Banjara Seva Sangh (ABBSS)' and put on letterheads and on other stationaries of AIBSS. On which Shri Makhram Pawar, Shri Ranjit Naik and many other leaders gave clarifications that the earlier Akhil Bharatiya Banjara Seva Sangh (ABBSS), which was registered in 1981 by Shri Makharam Pawar and his other team-mates of 'Maharashtra Yuvak Mandal' along AIBSS's old leaders like; Shri Ram Singh Bhanawatji, Late Shri Babusinghji Rathod and his other Senior Colleagues of Samaj. It was registered at Assistant Charity Commissioner's (ACC) office, Akota, Maharashtra State, with following 19 signatory trustees.

Sr. No.	Name of the Trustee	Designation	Remarks
1.	Shri Babusingh Dagdusingh Rathod	President	Now Expired
2.	Shri Heerasingh Sada Pawar	vice President	Now Expired
3.	Shri Ramsingh Fakriji Bhanawat	Gen.Secretary	
4.	Shri Sakharam Dhavji Mude	Treasurer	Now Expired
5.	Shri Komalsingh Lalsingh Ade	Member	Now Expired
6.	Shri Gajadhar Ramsingh Rathod	Member	
7.	Shri Vijaysingh Bhagwan Naik	Member	
8.	Shri Atmaram Kaniram Rathod	Member	
9.	Shri Makharam Bhaduji Pawar	Secretary	
10.	Shri Kanhaiyalal Bugaji Jadhav	Vice President	
11.	Shri Bhopidas Rathod	Member	
12.	Smt. Rekha Kesarsingh Rathod	Member	
13.	Shri Laxman Soba Rathod	Member	
14.	Shri Durgadas Kisandas Rathod	Secretary	
15.	Shri Prabhu Laxman Ade	Member	
16.	Smt. Devayani Lalsingh Pawar	Member	
17.	Shri Bansilal Somla Jadhav	Member	
18.	Shri Sonba Chandu Naik	Member	Now Expired
19.	Shri Babusingh Pandu Pawar	Member	

The old Constitution of ABBSS was in Marathi language and was registered in 1981. Since then, for the last 18 years, not a single audit report and change report were submitted in the office of the ACC, Akola. Not even a small piece of paper was found in the office of the said ACC, Akola, except papers connected to the said registration in 1981. Besides out of 19 trustees, 5 left this world and the same was not communicated to ACC, Akola. Under these circumstances and on our enquiry from the said ACC, Akola, we found that it was impossible to revive the old registered title of Sangh (ABBSS). Rather new leadership of AIBSS could have wasted its time nothing less than two to three years in reviving the old title and which organisation and title has been completely crippled will be in vain. Therefore the surviving 13 Founder Trustees made an application to ACC, Akola and got the said old registered *Akshil Bharatiya Banjara Seva Sangh (ABBSS)* dissolved. As such, by law and as per the Bombay Public Trust Act, of 1950, under which new AIBSS has been registered by the name and title as "AIBSS" cannot use the title of old dissolved title as ABBSS. Since the presently registered name, AIBSS is on the similar lines of 'All India Congress Committee (AICC)'. Therefore whether we write this registered name and title in English letters or in Hindi letters or in any other Indian language letters, the registered name and title of AIBSS cannot be translated and written. Because of writing of such true translated names and title in any other languages of India, by law and as per Bombay Public Trust Act of 1950, will become illegal. However the same registered name and title can be put in Hindi or in any other language letters as it is, without carrying its true translation, which has been already done on our letterheads and on other stationaries. But not the true translation of the name and title of the Sangh, i.e., AIBSS. Another important factor is that the original and founder name and title of Digras first Conference was "All Indian Banjara Seva Sangh (AIBSS)", founded by our great founder leader Late Shri Vasantrao P. Naik. This is purely legal and technical matter and requirements. All these developments have been discussed in number of meetings, since New Leadership took charge of Sangh in May 1998 and has been resolved long back. Shri D. Ravindra Naik was part of all these decisions as the then General Secretary of the Sangh.

This has been exhaustively explained in the circular of AIBSS, dated 07-03-2000 consisting of 16 pages, in Hindi as well as in English languages circulated to all the NEC Members, including Shri D. Ravindra Naik, at his Delhi as well as Hyderabad address, to all State and Mega City branches as well as to many stalwart leaders and our National Advisory Committee Members, Shri Sudhakarraoji Naik, Shri Ramsinghji Bhanawat and many others. All this process has been done democratically, by unanimous decisions and resolutions passed in the Meetings of 25th and 26th January, 1999 at Mumbai NEC Meeting of 9th and 10th March, 1999 at Delhi and in the meeting of 25th and 26th December, 1999 at Gandhi Nagar, Gujarat, where full quorum of General Council Members were present. In all these meetings Shri D. Ravindra Naik was participant and signatory. Therefore, President, expressly said that it is unfortunate that though so much water has been flown under this issue for the last two years of new leadership, even then he was surprised that Shri D. Ravindra Naik has raised this unproductive and unwanted issue who is a matured and experienced leader of Sangh. This clarification gave satisfaction to all the participants.

Approach III

Then it was discussed on the Third option conducting Seminars, Rallies and other agitational approaches and it was decided that all these democratic agitational approaches should also be explored and done at all the State Head Quarters, by our branches. Finally we have to organise a big rally of 5 to 10 Lac Banjara people at boat club, near Parliament House, New Delhi. But the same should be postponed for the time being by 5 to 6 months, until we get exhausted by all our other approaches as detailed here, in getting the solution through First and Second approaches.

Approach IV

Fourth option regarding attempting to create a Third Schedule by the approach of wider forum, "Denotified and Nomadic Tribals Rights Action Group (DNT & NT RAG)", the confederation consisting of 200 and odd Ex-criminal (Denotified Tribes / Vimukta Jatis) of India, as per the Government of India Notification 1952. This should be independently and simultaneously done by that forum, for which AIBSS should support and AIBSS should become one of the members of the said federation (forum) to sign memorandums and other documents as one of the constituent of the said forum. But at the same time an independent approach to fight for the rights and causes of Banjaras by AIBSS should go on.

Approach V

Fifth Approaching, through legal forums : After hearing the explanations given by Supreme Court Advocate Shri Devarajan, in regard to legal approaches, pros and cons of the same, many delegates raised questions, doubts and clarifications in all angles and aspects. Finally it was resolved that the fifth approach going to Court of laws of the country in the form of Writ Petitions, should be kept as a last and ultimate resort, when all the other four avenues / approaches are exhausted.

The meeting was concluded by 6.00 pm with vote of thanks toasted by Shri Shankar Jadhav, General Secretary of AIBSS.

Note : Next day, i.e. on 21-08-2000 the delegation of AIBSS met the following National Leaders and submitted the copies of memorandum which was submitted to Justice Venkatachallaih Commission (NCRWC).

1. Smt. Sonia Gandhi, MP, President, AICC and Opposition Leader in Parliament;
2. Shri Yerran Naidu, MP, TDP; 3. Shri Venkaiah Naidu, MP, General Secretary, BJP;
4. Shri Jual Oram, Honourable Minister for Tribal Affairs, Government of India (By part of delegates); 5. Shri Dilip Singh Bhuriya, Chairman, SC and ST Commission (By part of Delegates)

Wanderer, Grow Home

Debashish Mukerji

(Reprinted from *The Week*, December 24, 2000)

One morning in January 1990, lawyer Ratan Katayani, standing outside the magistrate's court at Thanagazi in Rajasthan's Alwar district, saw an unusual sight. A small, dark bedraggled, old man in handcuffs was being escorted to the court by three policemen, with half a dozen women and two dozen children tugging at his clothes and begging them to set him free.

From the women's apparel it was obvious that they were Banjaras, the largest of the nomadic groups in the state. What heinous crime had the man committed? Katayani, curious, followed the man into the courtroom.

"Read the file," said the magistrate curtly, when Katayani asked.

The man, Krishna alias Peeru, was being charged under Section 107 of the Criminal Procedure Code which allows detention on suspicion of any person unable to provide a fixed, permanent address.

"Why don't you tell the policemen to stop harassing poor people this way?" Katayani asked the magistrate.

"You have no idea what crooks these nomads are," the magistrate replied. "They are the ones responsible for the recent spurt in crime." Although Section 107 is a non-cognizable, bailable offence, he sentenced Krishna to a fortnight in jail.

Before the order could be written down, Katayani stood up. "I am moving a bail application on his behalf," he said. "You can reject it if you like. I'll then go and appeal."

The magistrate looked at him as if he doubted his sanity. But he did not dare reject the application outright. Granting bail, he fixed a surety of Rs. 10,000 - exceptionally high for the offence.

"Why are you doing this?" Katayani asked.

"Because I know he is bound to jump bail. Once he leaves this court, we'll never see him again," the magistrate said.

Since Krishna knew no one who could stand surety, Katayani offered to do it himself. His fellow lawyers were aghast, and though the magistrate took him into his chamber to dissuade him, Katayani remained firm. Krishna was set free and told to present himself in court a fortnight later.

While coming out of the court some time later, Katayani was wondering if he had not made a mistake. Krishna might have already disappeared. As he came to the gates, he found Krishna, along with the women and children, waiting for him.

"Far from running away, they were waiting to thank me," Katyayani said. "I explained to them why it was necessary for him to come to court in 15 days, I gave him my address and suggested he meet me at home a day earlier so that I could escort him. But he came home the very next day saying he would camp outside my house so as to be available whenever the court wanted him. So much for the unreliability of the nomads."

As a child Katyayani had seen ghumantoos (nomads). They camped occasionally near his village, but were driven away if they stayed too long. After meeting Krishna, he realised that these indefatigable travellers wandered in small bands all their lives, never making a permanent roof over their heads. He visited Krishna at his camp, high up in the Aravali hills, 20 km from Thanagazi town. He kept returning after work every evening, often spending nights at the camp.

He was appalled that progress had bypassed the wanderers. Unable to provide "proof of residence", they had no ration cards. None of them had citizenship rights, none of them figured on the voters' list. None of their children went to school. Many of their women had taken to prostitution for survival. Their children were born on the move, their elders died on the move. "It was as if, in the eyes of the state, they did not exist," Katyayani said.

Talking to Krishna and his companions, he found that nomads no longer relished their lifestyle - so romantic to poetic eyes - and wanted to settle in one place. The Banjaras made a living out of selling salt and multani mitti (fuller's earth, a body cleansing powder) but who wanted it any more when soap was freely available.

The Nats, another nomadic tribe, were village fair entertainers, jugglers and tightrope walkers, but cinema and television robbed them of patrons. The story was no different in the case of the Kalbelias (snake charmers) : not even children were amused by their performances any longer. And Gadiya Lohars, blacksmiths who travelled from village to village, making and rearing agricultural implements, lost out to factories that mass produced implements of far greater sophistication.

Besides, camping itself was becoming difficult. "Where is the place to camp these days," said Chidiya, a middle-aged woman of a Gadiya Lohar band living on the edge of the Jaipur-Alwar highway, near Maruthana village. "Villagers shoo us away wherever we go."

For the wanderers, death could be as hard as life. "Villagers won't let us cremate our people in their cremation grounds," said Chhaganram, leader of a Banjara camp at Bhilwara village of Jaipur district. "They claim the ghosts will haunt them. We need a place to call our own."

Politicians and officials have always insisted that the nomads do not want to settle down and that they have rarely approached the land allotment committees that the government has set up in every block of villages. "Nomads are entitled to priority allotment," said Krishna Murari Gangwar, MLA from Thanagazi and member of the local committee. "But they don't come to us." The nomads told Katyayani that officials did not listen to their persistent pleas for land.

Ratan Katyayani had always been inclined towards social activism and had set up an NGO for peasants, Muktidhara, in 1988. Having heard Krishna and his companions out, he became obsessed with their rehabilitation; quitting his legal practice, he took up their cause full time. He offered them a radical solution : if the government was not giving them land, they should simply grab some.

Katyayani's motto was simple "Jo zamin sarkar ki hai, woh zamin hamari hai. (Government

land is our land). But he insisted that they take only siwaichak land - unclaimed and unassessed revenue land - not private land, disputed land, land allotted for projects, or notified forest land. Krishna's band agreed.

Katyayani soon formed three groups to search for a suitable site : one group had all the men in the band : another had all the women; the third consisted of Katyayani and volunteers from Muktidhara.

"The men were to check out how safe a site would be, especially the attitude of surrounding villages," Katyayani said. "The women were to judge the quality of life the different sites offered. The Muktidhara group looked into the legal aspect, how feasible acquiring each site would be."

Finally, Bamanwas Chogan village, 20 km from Thanagazi, with plenty of flat land which could be cleared for cultivation, was chosen in mid-1991. There settled 20 families. "We have been here since and have never regretted it," said Kera, 65 and fiercely moustachioed. He was among the first settlers, along with Krishna, who died in 1995.

Since then Katyayani has helped set up 25 other settlements in the same way, giving a home to 20,000 people. Under his guidance, 17 more groups have selected their sites and 40 others are inclined to settle. Most of these settlements are in Alwar district, a few spilling over into Jaipur, Sikar and Dausa.

"Every time a group settles, we ask its members to plant trees around their houses," Katyayani said. "The size of the trees becomes a record of their length of stay, in case the government tries to evict them." He gives every settler a Muktidhara identity card - deterrent for policemen and forest guards who may want to harass the settlers.

The police and the officialdom consider them encroachers. "What Katyayani is doing should hardly be encouraged," said Vinay Kumar, tahsildar at Thanagazi, "The nomads should ask the village panchayats for land. They have no right to simply occupy!"

It is their human right, Katyayani said. "When surplus land exists and those required to distribute this land are not doing their job, what is wrong if we occupy it ? he asked. "If what we are doing is illegal, why has the government not evicted the settled nomads yet?" On the contrary, the government has been regularising encroachments, the latest order giving legitimacy to those up to April 23, 1977.

The settlers, however, have been facing hostility from neighbouring villagers. "We have taken a decision at our last panchayat meeting in October that the Banjaras would not be allowed to stay," said Shyamlal Boonkar Sarpanch of Bhilwara, where a nomad settlement came up six months ago. "We have stopped them from using our wells and borewells."

The Banjaras there have no water source of their own. "The villagers break our pots whenever we approach," said the Banjara leader Chhaganram.

Why are the villagers hostile ? Boonkar said the Banjaras were selling drugs and stealing livestock. Dismissing the allegation, Katyayani asked : "Would they be so poor if they were in the drug trade ?"

In September 1992, Jats of Haldina village attacked a three month-old settlement of 70 Banjara families, burnt several houses and stripped naked a young woman named Chidiya. Arrests were made, only after Katyayani led a massive march to the Alwar District Collector's house. Undaunted, the Jats burnt down the settlement a year later. The Banjaras fled, never to

return to Haldina.

In most other places the nomads have stuck it out despite assaults. In December 1993 Brahmin villagers attacked 12 Nat families in Unhpur village in Alwar, forcing them to flee. In August 1995, a drunk Banjara made a nuisance of himself near the marketplace at Hodh village in Sikar district, where 120 Banjara families had settled. Using this as pretext, 10 Jat dominated villages surrounded the settlement, unleashing terror and forcing the nomads to flee. But in both these cases and in numerous others the nomads have returned.

Katyayani's response to such assaults has always been the same petitions, marches and sit-ins at the Collectorate. "The nomads have shown immense courage," Katyayani noted. "I tell them I cannot be with them all the time, nor can I hire toughs to help them. I can only alert the authorities."

He no longer tries to settle those who are fearful of their security. The Gadiya Lohar group at the Aruthana roadside, for instance, would settle only if the government allots land to it. "I respect their decision," he said.

Katyayani himself has been assaulted half a dozen times. "I never travel alone anymore," he said. The most bizarre assault was at Gudha village in March 1996 as he was on his way home from Bamanwas. A village madman was provoked into biting him on his upper arm while village toughs rained blows on him. Tearing at his flesh, the madman just would not let go until some Bamanwas settlers rushed to his rescue.

In the jungles near Kishori, at the bus stand in Haldina, outside the Nat settlement in Jaisingpura, Katyayani has been set upon, beaten, kicked, or had his bones broken. "But I have never filed cases," he said. "Had I complained, my ghumantoos would have been rendered even more vulnerable. Why should they suffer for my sake?"

Settling down is only the first step in a long new journey. Then begins the struggle to enter the voters' list, get ration cards and land deeds. They need borewells, schools for their children and new kinds of work.

"For most of these there is no alternative to lobbying," said Katyayani, "You have to submit petition after petition, meet officials again and again. You have to be very patient and persevering. But if officials prove unreasonable or demand bribes, you have to hold demonstrations."

His office is bursting with files of such petitions and he has led innumerable demonstrations. It was after a week long march from Alwar to Jaipur in August 1993 that the Banjaras were recognised as OBCs.

Most people in the 26 settlements now have voting rights and ration cards; most of the early settlements have got one borewell. Some of the settlers, like those in Bamanwas and Ganeshpura, have got pattas (title deeds) for their lands as well. There is even a telephone in Ganeshpura.

Schooling, however, posed a problem. The children were enrolled all right, but in many a cases school bullies did not allow them to enter the classes. "The bullies beat our children and sent them away, and the teachers did nothing to stop them," said Kela, Banjara woman panchayat member from Ganeshpura.

Katyayani then set up a dozen one teacher non-formal schools in the settlements. Beena Saini, teacher at Ganeshpura, adjoining the Sariska National Park, uses the classroom—a thatched hut—only during the rains. When the sun is shining, both she and the students prefer the open. There are three classes comprising 25 boys and 10 girls aged 4 to 14.

"I have divided the children into three groups on the basis of age," she said. "We teach basic skills : reading, writing and arithmetic."

The teachers do much more than that. Tarat Saini, who runs the school at the Indok Bhartahari, teaches in the mornings and spends the rest of the day with the women, listening to their problems and trying to find solutions. "If someone is seriously ill, I take her to hospital," she said. "I have taken groups of women to Thanagazi and Alwar to lobby for borewells and other facilities. We have opened recurring deposit accounts for the women, and I ensure that they put in Rs. 20 every month."

Katyayani regretfully admitted that he had not been able to find new employment avenues for the nomads. A few fortunate ones - like the Bamanwas or Ganeshpura residents - have taken up farming, but the others continue to buy and sell salt and multani mitti or work as agricultural or construction labourers.

"I want them to learn technical skills, the sort imparted in ITIs, but I don't have the funds to start classes," Katyayani said. Only sewing classes are being held in Bamanwas and Ganeshpura. "The women were fascinated on the first day," said Geeta Saini, who teaches sewing at Ganeshpura. "They had never seen a sewing machine before."

Crutches can cripple if used for too long. "I have a dream," said Katyayani. "I have a dream that one day I will disappear and the nomads will never see me again. They should not remain dependent. They should become so aware and confident that they don't need a Muktidhara."

Two years ago he began making preparations for his own exit by setting up a Vikas Sangathan (Development Committee) at every nomad settlement. Men and women have equal representation in the committee, and it sends two members-a male and a female-to an apex body called the Ghumantoo Vikas Panchayat (GVP), which formulates policy. "The GVP decides everything," said Katyayani. "Their members meet officials. I am already in the background."

The GVP is already treading in an area which Katyayani, as an outsider, steered clear of: social reform. Curbing alcohol consumption among nomads is high on the list. "Even their women drink," Sarpanch Boonkar said, his lip curling in distaste. The nomads admitted it was true. "Drink has ruined our people," said Nasiya, the woman GVP member from Bamanwas, "But only now are we beginning to realise it."

Blind faith is another bane. "Most of them don't go to doctors, but to faith healers," said Mamraj, a Muktidhara worker. "They worship the deity Tejali and think she will cure all their diseases." The reformers are also opposing bride price, the male dowry. "The prevailing rate is Rs. 1 lakh," said Nasiya ruefully. "I don't know how I'll ever get my sons married."

Yet another distressing feature, which the GVP has not yet addressed, is increasing prostitution. "Unless we can offer an alternative means of livelihood, how can we ask them to stop?" Katyayani reasoned. What was worse, he noted, was the growing incidence of child prostitution. Young girls have been greatly in demand every since the AIDS scare, since people believe that the younger a girl is, the chances of her being HIV positive are lower.

As Katyayani said, very few respectable people have anything nice to say about his work. But the nomads love him. And he takes satisfaction, he said, "from the fact that I have settled people, not destroyed them."

The Last Shamanin

Mahasweta Devi

Once the hill Saoras of Orissa used to paint Ittalan on their walls when gods and goddesses appeared in their dreams and demanded it. Ittalan is not a religious painting, but religion to them.

The Rathwa Bhils of Gujarat paint Pithoro/Babo Pithoro on their walls. Pithoro is not a religious painting, but religion to them.

Ittalan is almost extinct now, due to large scale onslaught of the mainstream upon Saora land, life patterns and culture. Pithoro exists. It is a living continuity.

"Once in Koraput and Ganjam, they sold the child in the mother's womb."

Koiti Saorin's granny, Nandi Shamanin tells her this out of desperate anxiety and stares at her with puzzled eyes. As if the words are prized possessions, for her to protect. So she confides in Koiti. As if Koiti is a mayasarovar. Nandi just has to drop the words and they will remain perpetually afloat for the seekers of truth.

They are thekedar's labour. Those thekedars had entered their lives fifty years ago. They swept their magic brooms and uprooted the small, terrorised and helpless small tribal communities, threw them in the hungry currents, prodded them towards different labour camps. That was the first phase of building big dams and industries destroying tribal land, forest, hills and villages.

Dandasi, Audiniya, Oriya Dom, Ghasi, Gonda, Jaintri Paan, Munda Potta, Pairi, Peddati, Thelaramwad, Saora, Kond, Paraja, ended in the same labour camp.

Now Ghanshyam says, 'Money and development is in the west. 100-120 rupees per day, room to stay, clothes and all, what more?'

Thekedari is a great unity-forger. These communities, in the homeland neither knew, nor interacted with each other. Each community remained ensconced in their world. Belief, custom, work and culture, all different from each other. And in this total ignorance about each other, they were deeply content. But this mighty flood from the outside world threw them together. If they cook in the same kitchen, get water from the same tubewell, how long can such barriers exist? After all, all of them are from the same state, and speak the same language, and are driven to strange places where no one speaks their language.

Ghanshyam's magic wand has supernatural powers. With one sweep of the wand he can bring labour from southeast Bihar to Delhi, or Uttar Pradesh. He can whisk away tribal labour from Orissa and drop them in the west. For his type of thekedari, tribal labour is best. They

are afraid of the word sarkar, have little literacy and know nothing of the various acts the sarkar has made for their benefit. No ration card, no citizenship, no electoral power, they can be packed like sardines in trains, buses or trucks, and can be taken anywhere.

And such Ghanshyams are countless, very mobile, very operative. They collect Pardhis, Banjaras, Karwal Nuts, Bhamtas from rural Maharashtra and take them to Mumbai. They work as casual labour. When there's work, it is fine, when no work, you fend for yourself. These thekedars control slums where these people stay. No census, no elector's slip, no ration card. They stay in India, but have no citizenship.

"Now Koiti, children will be born on the streets, and, eventually die there."

Koiti's father was furious, "Why won't you tell me anything? Your only surviving son? Traditionwise wisdom has to be handed over."

"Why should I? The thekedar said, leave her behind. Why drag a burden? And you kept mum. Koiti, though young, said I'll take her responsibility. So I've to tell her all the secrets. She's the next shamanin."

"But why?"

"She knows all, and doesn't know that she stores all the knowledge within. She'll talk to the gods, protect us."

"Where are the gods? And what protections for us, eternal nomads? I'm not going to lift a finger if you fall ill."

"A shamanin does not fall ill son, she dies."

Nandi trusts no one. Never speaks to others. Sits still, as if in trance. But at odd and unexpected moments, whispers into Koiti's ear.

In the suburbs of Nasik, when Koitis have started evening-cooking amidst a din of quarrels, debate on vegetable prices, loud singing and soft lullabies, Nandi brought her pyorrhea- smelling-shrivelled mouth to Koiti's ears and whispered, "Once... in Koraput and Ganjam; if a woman got pregnant, they'd sell the unborn child... yes, they did..." her voice trailed off and leaning her back against the wall she shut her eyes and dozed.

Who sold the unborn child?

Who purchased, and why?

Nandi would not utter one word more.

Once they lay huddled on the railway platform of Surat waiting for the train to Amalner. Nandi clutched at Koiti and said, "They'd die while in transit and would be cremated with discarded motor-tyres, dowsed with kerosene."

Words, born of ancient wisdom of experience are thus picked up by Nandi and dropped on the mayasarovar of Koiti's mind. The lake keeps them afloat.

When did they start on their endless journey? Destination unknown, yet always on the move? They know nothing, the thekedar knows everything. A magician. Takes them to the right place. Heavy polythene sheets draped over tall steel cottage-like frames.

Magic? Or sheer thekedari professionalism? Pipe water for drinking, washing and cooking. A separate kitchen shed. Improvised toilets. The thekedar's warning, "Beware of fire hazards." Work to rules, work to rules. Very professional, very military. Loud gossip and exchange of pleasantries are frowned upon. Yet the Parajas play flutes, the Ghasis sing. No one dares talk to Koiti, since Nandi clings to her. People hold Nandi in awe. After all she is a shamanin. In her

youth gods appeared in her dreams and said, "One Ittalan for me, Shamanin !"

She painted the wall with red clay, made rice-paste for white, charcoal dust and burnt rice paste for black. Would hang a sheaf of paddy on the wall, sacrificed a red fowl, offered wine to the god and would paint. For god, you paint your view of the universe where men, animal life, god and nature stay in harmony. So she painted the sun, the moon, the stars, the cowherd, the hunter, dancers and singers, the peacock, the deer, the tiger, cows and goats, women carrying water, a child in a cradle, frolicking boys and girls. A joyous and vivacious panoramic depiction of the Saora world.

And she talked with the gods, knew the secrets of a flowing river, a green hill, a rich field. One cannot be intimate with such a person. Her eyes are innocent and full of wonder. The age-old body is almost virginal and ageless.

The tribals are not all Saoras. Yet they look upon her as custodian of tribal knowledge and wisdom. A shamanin ! Not a matter of joke.

Once on way to Rajkot, Nandi suddenly woke up from sleep and said, "Koiti, let time come you'll remember it all."

"How Granny ?"

Didn't I whisper to you, all I know ?

"When ?"

"When you were kicking in the womb, ready to come out any day. Oh, how tired I was ! Chasing the white goat the entire afternoon !"

"What did you say ?"

"Everything I know. You must pass on your knowledge to one not yet born. Once you do, the unborn child becomes a Shaman, or a Shamanin ! Your mother was heavy with child and I was gently rubbing her abdomen with feather-touch strokes. As she fell asleep, I bent over the navel, and told you all. So you are the next Shamanin. You'll paint Ittalan the way I do everyday."

"Why do I not remember a single word ?"

"You will, child. Let the right time come."

"Always on the move granny, how to paint Ittalan ?"

"You have to, the Saoras are straws in a flood, dry leaves blown by the storm. I knew bad days are coming. The gods were in such distress ! I had to do something for them. They'd be homeless !"

"And we are homeless !"

"Its an endless story child ! They need us, we're their abode. And we need them, us and them have always been together... so I did what I could. So I painted one giant ittalan on my wall and gave abodes to all the sums, the gods. I named it sakalo sumero gurha, offered puja and left."

"I've heard about it."

That abode of all the gods is a lost ittalan now, but an oral legend.

The Saora villages were being usurped. The Saoras were leaving, new maliks, the money lenders, banias and thekedars were taking over. But a mud wall with awe-inspiring paintings in vivid colours in an abandoned village, sent shock waves. It was something beyond their ken. So baffling. Everyone felt guilty, as if they've defiled a consecrated ground.

They shook their heads, scattered rice, dry flowers, dried blood, a tribal offering.

They built a high mud wall all around it, but the new bus road came, along with shops, liquor dens and bazaars.

Came a photographer. He took thousands of photos. The photos reached the outer world. Then in block prints. They mass-produced saris, counter panes, wall hangings and curtains. The italan sungod, the forest god, the guardian deities of the grassland, the splendid houses of the sums, the sun-hunting Saora archer, became a bazaar product. Nothing was sacred or secret about the Saora life.

The sakalo sumero gruha awaited the return of the Saoras. Then gave up. It started crumbling down.

Today Sumero Mandap is a busy bus junction, and a flourishing market of liquor shops, video parlours and cheap costume jewellery, the chief clientele are the impoverished tribals.

"The gruha no longer exists, dadi."

"Who says so? I paint all the time."

"Oh, dadi! Where?"

"I close my eyes, and a mud wall rises in my mind. And I paint. It's real child, what you do in mind."

"Yes, dadi."

"You'll have to. After me."

Bad times visited them at Rajkot. Many of Ghanshyam's labourers died of liquor poisoning. Koiti's parents died too. There was a mass-cremation, ganachita. Koiti and others stood at a distance, too dazed to mourn the dead.

They withdrew into themselves. An eerie silence. Ghanshyam felt very insecure and wary. What if they refused to trust him further? He should have seen that they did not go for a drink to Dilbar's place. So he lamented and howled. Cursed the addiction of these fools! Why drink? He doesn't. And what a way to die! How to manage people who are so callous about their own welfare!

Nandi lifted her hand. Said, "Enough is enough, Ghanshyam. Now see that the after-death rites are properly done, and mourning ceremony for the relatives. Ashes must be put in urns and thrown in a river."

Every one felt a sense of relief. Mohan Paidi said humbly, "Whatever you say Shamanin!"

"Now that we are in strange places, we will have to do whatever we can." In the night Koiti nestled to Nandi and buried her face in her chest.

"Feel all alone, child?"

"You are here."

Nandi caressed her hair and said, "The first one died of snake bite. The daughters married and left. Your father... I still remember how I carried him to the grassy slope, and cut grass. Once he injured his leg... then he brought your mother, and we lived in peace. Was not hardworking, your father... also not very sharp..."

"It hurts, dadi?"

"It does. But they will live in peace. Long ago I painted their abodes, gave them fields... goats... Koiti! Start to concentrate child! Else how shall you reach home?"

"Home, dadi?"

"Paint one. For yourself. Tonight I paint Italan for all who died. Not Saoras all, yet they need a home. Else where shall their children go?"

"Big huts?"

"Not too big. And no roads. In the depth of forest covered hills. No roads. No thekedar."

"I'd love to go there."

"You will, if you truly want to. Evil times are coming child, but you'll escape that."

"I can't be on constant move!"

"No, you have to reach home."

"How long will I be able to work...."

"Thekedar won't let you go. And he is better than many."

It's true, Ghanshyam is a born thekedar. He abhors the flesh trade. He is not interested in women, hates drinking, his personal work-schedule is very harsh. It is a professional and competitive job. He believes that as the son of a small pan-shop owner, he had decided correctly. Thekedar is what he was born for. His job was supplying cheap itinerant labour for big construction work, and he'd do just that. He has goodwill in the market of his world where big contractors distribute work among the subcontractors, and subcontractors depend upon Ghanshyams.

He was wise to select his area of operation, Orissa. Fragmented into small Indian fendatories. No land reform. The poor were kept cowered and cringing for centuries. He selected the vratya and fringe tribals, and has not regretted his judgement till date. They are not garrulous, or workshy, or demanding. Very very obedient. Each group of twenty five has its own sardar, who is paid by the khatedar. Wage is strictly measured by work load. A hundred per day, or more, or less. Following the Bhils from Berar, they too buy silver ornaments. Nandi shakes her head. The Bhils saved money to purchase land in the home village. Now they save for bride-price.

Nandi whispers, "They've forgotten the past. Now they demand thousands and thousands for bride-price. What foolishness!"

"What'll happen Dadi?"

"Curse! We are cursed people. Who will pay so much for a bride! Soon non-tribals will pay a higher sum, marry the girls and sell them to bad people."

"And then?"

"Its all a dark river Koiti, lamps are floating on the river. Some lamps... will sink. What to do? We left the gods. They too left us."

No one associated the word 'marriage' with Koiti. She never entertained the prospect of marriage.

A shamanin's life is predestined, when could she marry? Youth bypassed her long ago. Hard body, hard bones, an impassive face, people seldom approached her. A choli, a sari, a churno. Thick black hair, oiled and tightly braided, three silver earrings in each ear, eyes black and inscrutable.

Ghanshyam often tells her, "Don't leave, Koiti."

"You mean run away?"

Ghanshyam has no answer.

"Where to thekedar? Do we know the places you bring us to? Who understands our

language ? We have no place to go to.

"I see to your food.. give clothes... blankets in winter... do ilaj when one is ill..."

"Yes, you did a lot for my parents."

"Why did they drink to excess ?"

"You won't understand, ever. You say 'why.' See, we have no desh, no ghar, no one is interested in us. We are kept outside the town area. And so many watchmen ! The unhappy ones drink, thekedar. Take us to Cuttack. You'll see, everyone will leave."

"And what is there for the likes of you ? Would they come if there was..."

"Desh is there."

"Work hard. Purchase silver. When you go back, purchase land."

"I'll tell them."

"I am not a bad man Koiti. Got Gomti and Baru married and they settled at Nasik. Didn't I spend a lot ?"

"But didn't allow Bhanu to marry."

"Hey ! That Chand fellow is a scum ! One wife in L'atehpur, another at Partapgarh, he'd have ditched Bhanu and vanished . Even then Bhanu left for him. The anpad labour of thekedar, Koiti ! Once they leave, they are lost."

"I know that."

"They are sold."

"I know that."

Ghanshyam is fifty, or sixty? Oil bath in the morning. Always in jeans and kurta. Oiled hair combed back. A leather shoulder bag, leather chappals. Like a patrakar in the films.

He is cool. Keeps his cool. Counts the rudrakshas in his hands. Supplies coolies and reja women to big construction builders anywhere in India, knows the political leaders and goons of the area. No one threatens him, or demands extortion money. He is famous for his expertise in whisking away helpless people from famine-prone areas of eastern India to the building sites.

He boasts, "My labour never run away, work hard, do not do danga fasad.

Koiti kept silent. You are speaking about us. Timid, threatened, insecure, you uproot us and throw us in the hungry and unknown currents. How can we escape and where?

"I show you so many new places. Would you ever go back to the rat hole ?"

"And what is so good about it, thekedar ? Let me do my chores. Dadi must have her ayurvedic oil massage. A shamanin, after all !"

No, They've seen nothing. Mumbai, Pune, Nasik, Ahmedabad, Baroda, nothing. Did they ever see Baripada, or Bhubaneswar, Cuttack or Puri ? Not Surat, Rajkot, Faltan, Durg, or Dhulia, nothing.

Yet they have been to those places, but all they saw were giant steel structures. Steel ladders. Loads of brick, bags of cement. Not places.

Now when Koitis ride a truck convoy and travel fast on national highways flanked by jungles of brilliantly lit high-rises and lush gardens, they can't trace in which blocks of these satellite townships they had worked. They never saw the finished houses, ever.

Koitis are clay dolls made by the blind potter Kisan Naika. Kisan's fingers spoke to the lumps of clay and made elephants, horses, gods and goddesses, brides and grooms. Then his

daughter-in-law and grandson lit the fire, gently baked the clay, painted the dolls. Kisan's son sold them. But Kisan never had seen the finished product. He'd say, "God robbed me of my eyes. My father taught my fingers how to mould the clay. The fingers make them."

Kisan's dolls were well-known. Mother with the child was very popular. Kisan had never seen one.

Koitis have assisted the construction work, but had never seen a finished building.

They'd have gone back, had they been immigrant labourers. But itinerant labour have no place to go back to. So they move on and on. One who cannot, is left behind. When one is constantly on the move, some have to be left behind.

She won't leave Nandi behind. To Ghanshyam, Nandi is Sindbad's burden, but he dare not annoy Koiti and vent his despair. Koiti is an asset. Hardworking and strong, she is a sardar over twenty five people. Very brainy. Can calculate like a computer. Her dignity, stern personality and gravity has a good influence in the labour camp. After Nandi, she'll be the shamanin. Ghanshyam does not know what a shamanin is, but he is impressed by the awe Nandi generates.

"Your parents are dead. How old is she?"

"You are not to utter one word about her."

Nandi dies, and I'm lost. My mates of the first batch are not with us. Had they escaped, thekedar would raise a storm. Ghanshyam has his own laws. You are going up and up with a loaded basket on your head. If you stare down and are hit by vertigo, you are lost. A waste. So leave. An old worker, take ten day's pay as bonus and run.

There is no act for the itinerant casual labours. Contractor's labour are seldom covered by any labour law. Ghanshyam says, "Constructions everywhere, who is adhering to labour laws? Who'll do it? A country of thieves?"

Yes, Ghanshyam too has to be radical when it suits him and spit at the system which nurtures his brotherhood:

Thus, tired ones have left. Where do they go? Koiti doesn't know. Where, in the suburbs of which town they have pitched their tents? Bamboo poles and polythene sheets? Failing to make their needs understood? Language barrier is such a Chinese wall!

Ghanshyam says, "Town extends, and they are thrown out."

Nandi says, "With a giant broom."

O dadi! Why did you never paint an italan for the castaways?

On one such journey, when they'll alight at Chandore and go northeast, amidst the thunder of the rushing train, dim light and jerking wagons, Nandi clutched at Koiti in despair and whispered, "Why did the Saora archer pierce the sun?"

- "Why?"

- "Because... the earth had no fire...his arrow forced the sun to lend fire."

- "You're gasping. Some water?"

- "You'll remember, when time comes. You'll close your eyes and see all."

- "Yes dadi, sleep."

Nandi, in a voiceless whisper, said, "I am going...to...the...sakalo sumero gruha."

Two or three feeble tremors, and Nandi was still, relaxed. Koiti clasped her and sat. Dadi! You've gone to the Sakalo Sumero Gruha? Go then! Now you'll shake off your age. Will be young and pretty. Go then! Go in joy. I too, will leave, the day my head spins looking down.

When will the time come, dadi? When shall I remember all?

But you've left me in an abyss of emptiness.

She stared at the window with dry, mute eyes. When the train stopped, she said, "Thekedar! Nandi is dead."

Ghanshyam's first reaction was, the bitch had to die now!

Then he thought, it's alright. Let the railway staff take all the responsibility.

But, after alighting, the labour said, "Thekedar! She's no Borju Gaoria's wife for the railway police to dump her in the morgue. She is a shamanin. It will be a sin to..."

- "Koiti! The trucks will come in time. And we have to go."

- "What can I do, tell me?"

Mahon Paidi is an old friend, a sardar over twenty five labours.

He said, "When are the trucks expected?"

- "Afternoon."

- "Let us leave later. Make the arrangements. The Saoras will cremate her, we'll be mourners. Do you agree, shamanin?"

- "Me, Shamanin?"

- "That's what she told us. That year she fell ill..."

- "You carried her to the toilette."

- "No tobacco leaf, so she took khaini."

- "You prepared it. Here is money, thekedar. Buy a new sari, a new sheet..."

The railway is a 'company' but niravyav. 'Rail company', only eleven letters. The letters exist strictly within the country. It has no avayava, it is a machine operated omnipotent right to exploit the Indian public, spread from east to west, north to south.

The thekedar, too, is a company. But his brotherhood is a global one. It too is niravyav, yet it is ferociously alive. It grows every second. It is ravenously hungry. Its tongue is always searching for food in this country's land, water, grass, village and forest.

Thekedar is the real controller of 'Bharat Rashtra.'

The amateur thekedars are small fry. They are not professionals. Ghanshyams are a minuscule part of the International Contractor Empire. They are subcontractors of subcontractors of Ag-mark construction companies. The laws are strictly abided by. Where shall the casual labour go, by what transport, where shall they stay, how many hours shall they work, without incurring annoyance of the local authority and the people, rules are rules, and those must be followed. These itinerant workers are poorer than cockroaches. Ghanshyams do not believe in tightening the screw and getting more work from them. Amateur thekedar-labour can go home. Professional thekedar labour cannot. Their fields and villages are usurped to build industries or dams.

So Ghanshyam has to see to Nandi's cremation, washing and food for the labour, and pack them in seven trucks at evening.

He runs like quicksilver and waves his magic wand. So Nandi Shamanin draped in a new sari, covered with a new sheet, is carried to the outer border of the samsan, and is soon reduced to ashes. Koiti stands motionless, her face impassive. Then she tears a strip from Nandi's black, borderless sari, ties it to a stick and buries the stump in the ashes. Mahon says, "Turn your back and leave. No one, I repeat, no one should turn one's head."

They go to a shed, meant for travellers on transit, take bath, Koiti too. They eat. Koiti doesn't. She sits still and stares ahead. The time has arrived. Nandi's secret words are surfacing. The words of wisdom and experience and awakening are rushing in like floods.

A clothes shop opposite. An STD booth, a shop selling lottery tickets, Dil kya kare from a cassette. This town too, must have been built by Koitis and handed over to others as they had left.

For years they are travelling by train. They must have laid the railways. Else who crushed the rocks and boulders. The long, overstretching straight highway, lit by fluorescent tubes, flanked by well-lit gardens, eating houses and pepsicola booths, this road too must have been built by Koitis.

A shamanin paints the world of sky and earth, water and fields, men, women and children, animals and birds. She gifts it to the gods.

Koitis build motor roads, railway lines, housing complexes, factories and hospitals, and gift it to others. And leave.

Mahon says, "Some water, shamanin?"

"Yes".

"Want a paan?"

She shakes her head. Yes, it is coming back. All that Nandi told her when she was in the womb.

Koitis come, build, give away their handiwork, and leave. For aeons of ages.

In the ititalan in their mind they have painted all the places they have yet to cover.

"Koiti ... time comes, you'll remember..."

Yes, now she remembers. The hills and forests, and tribal villages the thekedars raze to the ground, are ititalans created by Koitis. What they build, that too are their creation. Nothing is new in this world, nothing is old, it is an unbroken continuity. One can't keep Koitis within their time measure as they are older than time.

Koiti stared at her hands. These hands create and destroy. Then create again and give everything to others and goes on their journey.

Each time they give to others, always?

Or, such process too is an ititalan created by them?

Why didn't she know it before?

Now she has to cross over bounds of time and enter timelessness.

Seven trucks go towards the northeast for two days. Then reach the meeting place of three panchayat roads.

Two new metalled roads for a factory and a housing. Then more factories, more housing, it is a mammoth project. Countless labour, many thekedars. In this god forsaken place they see the roadside lights, rows of tents at a distance, food shops, hand pumps, telephone booths.

Seven trucks disgorge them, two tents swallow them. Arrangement pucca. Mahon says, "Canvass tents. Long term work."

Ghanshyam says, "Made by the prisoners in local jails. The company has purchased them." Rows of toilets. Five inches thick brick structure. Rows of bathing and washing sheds. Deep tubewells pumping water to tanks. Asbestos shed kitchen. Ghanshyam expansively declares, "We'll eat at the dhaba. Tomorrow we go to Chhote Panchgarh. Big mela. Great fun. Koiti!

Do eat something."

"Yes. First let us see where to stay."

In the night Koiti closed her eyes, concentrated on her mission and started painting italan. See, one's mind is a magic cave. Full of treasures stored. Why, here is the wall painted with red clay. Here are the italans full of different paints.

See the tree, the forest, the field lush with maroya marwa, a stream dazzling in sunlight. And see, Kishan Naika, the blind potter is making clay elephants, they are instantly alive, raising the trunk, trumpeting their joy. The spotted deer are jumping and fleeing to the forest. The clay horses are prancing and neighing, they are running. The clay mothers are real mothers now. Swaying their hips, they are filling the pitchers from the stream, clutching to their children. And the houses are the ones they left behind at Badihatta. The sun is leaning to see the earth. The kissans are irrigating their fields. What an expanse of forest. How green the hills are.

It's time now. So Koiti is able to create so much.

The mela fervour was at the peak. The labour munched peanuts and saw the acrobats dancing on the bamboo, horses dancing with tinkling bells wrapped around their ankles, the tribal women dancing together, and Koiti chose that very moment to slip away.

From the mela ground to the metalled road, then to the jungle path. The path now narrow, now wide was very soothing to her feet. She walked on in a trance. Her inside was all knotted. Now the knots were snapping. She could breathe. Floating on the starlit path she discovered that she was not alone on this ananta yatra from time to timelessness.

For, on her right is flowing a sandy-bed stream. Koiti realised that the river is giving her company.

At 3.00 a.m. she went down the bank, lay on her stomach and drank from the river. O river, stay with me. When night merges into dawn, she went down the ditch on the roadside. Stretching on the dry leaves she told herself, dadi was right, whatever I painted, see, all is true.

She fell asleep. Very peaceful, very secure. As if she is in the village Badihatta she left as a child. In her sleep she thought that she could hear brass-bells around the neck of the buffaloes. As if young boys were shouting. Though asleep, she knew that whatever she had painted was becoming true. This is what was to be. She forgot that once she had another identity, Ghanshyam's labour sardar. She herself had discarded her other identities. Koiti, the last shamanin has all the power. She is the creator, she is the controller of everything too. She would never have known her true and ultimate identity if Nandi had not died.

Chhote Panchgarh is forest, distant hills.

Rathwa Bhil and other tribals, and the river Orsang. Just walk on in one direction. Someday you will reach Madhya Pradesh. Take the opposite direction, someday you will reach Rajasthan. Koiti walked on, ignorant of these facts, she walked in the night, slept during the day, again walked after sunset. Orsang stayed with her. In the night she washed in the water, drank from the sparkling stream. O river! Stay with me.

The next day at 3 a.m. she knew she had reached her destination. Now she'll cross the barriers of time and enter the world of timelessness. Now the night sky would pale. Somehow she reached the banks of the Orsang. O, this too is a village road, there are big trees, but cultivated fields welcomed her. She walked on without knowing that this road would lead her to Dhari, a Rathwa Bhil village. The tribal huts would be in the interior. Koiti did not know it.

Only her walk-worn feet and a paripurna man told her, you have arrived.

Suddenly she saw a giant of a clay horse. See, Kisan Naika has left it here. It will spring into life, once Koiti touches it. Will carry Koiti to her destination. Nandi did say this. Ah, her strength is going down, down. Shuffling her feet, Koiti went to the horse. The eyes and feet of the horse said, "Why waste time?" She stretched out her arms wanting to clasp the horse's neck.

The giant clay horse, the sentinel of the debasthaan that had toppled sideways on a human being, was discovered by the Bhil boys.

The Rathwas came running. They laid Koiti with gentle care on a flat rock.

The sarpanch took some time to realise that she is the person, 'Missing Koiti Saorin' on police record. Then he went to the local thana, which contacted the taluka thana. From the taluka thana to the district Sadar Chhote Panchgarh thana. Ghanshyam and police could come only after this thana to thana circle was complete. They loaded her on a matador and left.

Koiti's arrival and death did not seem something unnatural to the Rathwas of Dhari village.

"She was a shamanin."

"It's alright."

They do not know the word 'shamanin', but it must be in the order of things. 'A thekedar's labour.' Yes, they know these words.

"Her dadi had died."

"Sure. Death happens to everyone."

"And she went mad with grief."

The Rathwas shook their heads in negation. If one, with one target in mind can walk for four days and three nights, following the Orsang, drinking from the river, hiding in the day, walking in the night to seek shelter from the sentinel of the debasthaan, the clay horse, dedicated to Babo Pithoro, such a person cannot be mad.

They found another, suitable explanation for this. What was inevitable, has happened. But impossible to make Ghanshyams see their reason.

And Nagin Rathwa, a young Bhil, wakes up in the night, goaded by a strong sense of urgency. He paints a horse, but not the frame. The black horse is running like mad, defying the bounds of frame. A black girl is on its back, clutching at the black mane.

Thus the last shamanin of the eastern Saoras get a place in the Pithoro of the western Rathwas. Now she is her own italan, whose horse is flying towards the timeless eternity, ananta.

She won't have to build and hand over, and leave to build and hand over her creation ever. She is going home.

Translated from the original Bangla by the author

Budhan : A Play

Dakshin Bajarange

Characters :

Budhan : Actor 1

Shyamali : Actor 2

Inspector Ashok Roy and Judge : Actor 3

Assistant Superintendent and Constable 1 : Actor 4

Ashish, Shopkeeper and Constable 2 : Actor 5

Gaurd and Constable 3 : Actor 6

Sridhar : Actor 7

Scene I

Actor 1 : Namaskar! Before we begin the play, let us glance at our history. Of the total population of a thousand million people in India, about six crore people belong to the denotified communities. For a reason unknown to anybody, we are singled out for bearing a burden. We are the DNTs. Or adivasis, the people belonging to ancient times. We have witnessed the changes taking place on earth for millenniums. We have been living amidst nature. We are born in the womb of nature. We also die in the lap of nature. Or are killed. We once owned the jungles, but today have to fight for our rights on the same forests. For centuries the DNTs have been killed. Earlier when a DNT passed through a village, his body was cut into pieces.

(A few tribals pass through the rear part of the stage, carrying wood. A few persons hiding in the forest attack them. Their terrifying and painstricken calls of help fill the stage. The tribals are butchered... All characters stand still).

Actor 7 : In 1979, the people of the Lodha community were tormented and drowned in water.

(The tribals are tied to the imaginary trees while actors 1, 2, and 4 speak to them).

Actor 3 : Submerge their heads in water.

Actor 5 : Force their heads in water till they stop breathing.

Actor 6 : Torment them to death.

Actors 1,2,4,7 : The heads of these tribals are plunged into the water.

They die in agony. All the characters assume their original positions.

Actor 7 : Nobody knows just how many denotified communities are being killed so brutally. Most of us are unaware of the atrocity being perpetrated on them. Rights are being snatched from the very people who rightfully own this country.

We present to you the story of one such community, the Sabars. This is the story of Budhan Sabar, a young man belonging to the Sabar community who was killed by police atrocity. We want change! We want a revolution!

(Each character, shouts for 'revolution' and then all stand in a single file.)

Chorus : There has already been one revolution, another is yet to take place. That was a revolution brought about by Bapuji. This revolution will be of the DNTs.

Actor 2 : What you are about to witness is not the end but a beginning.

Actor 1 : This is Akarbaid, a small village in West Bengal. The law views the Sabar community living here as a community of thieves.

Actor 6 : In this small village, Budhan was living a quiet life together with his wife Shyamli and their son.

Actor 3 : But on 10th February 1998, Budhan died. It was the day when the eyes of police officer Ashok Roy, who was used to taking the law in his own hands, fell on Budhan.

Actor 4 : A horrifying act that will force you to ask : Are we really? Even after fifty two years of Independence, the stigma of criminality of birth given by the British to the DNTs, continues to stick.

Actor 5 : This is an attempt to present the police atrocity Budhan Sabar had to face.

Scene 2

(The actors stand to take the form of a paan shop. Budhan walks across the street with his wife Shyamali. The shop owner calls him.)

Actor 5 (To Budhan) : O Budhan! Do buy a paan.

Actor 1 (Budhan looks at the shopkeeper and asks his wife) : Shyamali, would you like to have a paan? (Shyamali gives her assent shyly trying to hide her face behind the pallu of her sari. Budhan walks across to the paan shop) Give me two banarsi paans.

Actor 5 : I will fix them in a moment. (A few moments later, after applying kattha on the paan) O Budhwa, where are you going?

Actor 1 : Oh! It is a long stay? You know my matriarchal uncle? He is not well. We are going to meet him.

Actor 5 : Do remember me to him. Here, take your paan.

Actor 1 : And here is your money.

(Just as Budhan is paying the shopkeeper, A police officer takes hold of his hand. He has been moving around in the market looking for a Sabar whom he could hold responsible for all the pending theft cases lying with him.)

Actor 3 (Catching hold of Budhan's collar) : Aye you, what's your name?

Actor 1 (Frightened) : Budhan Sabar! Saab.

Actor 3 : I see, a Sabar! Come to the police station with me.

Actor 1 : But sir, what is my crime ?

Actor 3 : You bloody rascal, your greatest crime is that you dared question the law.

(The police officer pulls Budhan by the shoulder and throws him down on the pavement.)

Actor 1 : Sir! What are you doing? I...I was....

Actor 3 : Come to the police station without any arguments or I shall parade you naked through the market. (Kicks Budhan) Come with me!

Actor 1 : Please don't beat me, sir.

(Hearing Budhan's pleas, Shyamali rushes to his rescue)

Actor 2 : Budhan... What happened Budhan...? Budhan...Sir, why are you beating him...sir? What has my Budhan done, sir?

Actor 3 : You...who are you?

Actor 2 : Sir...me? I...I am Shyamali. His wife.

Actor 3 : Oh, his wife! Bitch, the wife of a thief. Go away. (He pushes Shyamali who falls on the ground. To the constable). Drag him through the market to the police station.

Actor 2 : (Shouts) Budhan!

(All characters stand motionless for a few moments).

Actor 2 : Shyamali is a simple, innocent woman.

Actor 1 : Budhan was not even informed about his crime before being arrested.

Actor 2 : It is the code of law that the accused be told his crime before being arrested.

Actor 6 : Budhan's crime lay in the fact that he belonged to the Sabar community, which is believed to be a community of thieves.

Actor 7 : But officer Roy ? He always used to keep the law on the edge of his rifle?

Actor 5 : Killing Sabars was just an enjoyable game for Officer Roy.

Actor 4 : Great! What a largecheated man is he.

(The actors assume the form of a police station)

Scene 3

Actor 3 (To the constable) : Take him away.

Actor 5 (Standing outside the police station) : Salaam, sir.

Actor 3 : Salaam.

(The constable locks Budhan in a cell. Officer Roy places his revolver on the table and after giving some instructions, goes towards the prison cell where Budhan is locked).

Actor 3 : (To Budhan) Tell me... where have you hidden the stolen goods?

Actor 1 (Frightened) : Sir... I have not stolen anything.

Actor 3 : You son of a bitch. I am very much aware that you have not committed any theft. But in the past ten days, seventeen thefts have taken place in this area. How many? Did you hear? Seventeen. I have to prepare the reports of these thefts. Don't you understand?

Actor 1 : But sir, I make baskets and sell them to the Co-operative, sir....

Actor 3 (Interrupting) : I do not care what you do. You will have to confess to your crime.

(Showing him the baton). After all, why else has the law given us this? Come, plead guilty.
(Officer Roy hits Budhan. Budhan cries out in pain. Officer Roy begins to beat him brutally. Meanwhile, Shyamali arrives at the police station, searching for Budhan).

Actor 2 (Trying to enter the police station): Budhan...Budhan...

Actor 5 (Stops Shyamali): Aye, woman, where are you going?

Actor 2: (Pleadingly) Sir, sir, I want to meet my husband, sir.

Actor 5: Your husband? Who is he?

Actor 2: He...whom the officer brought in a short while ago.

Actor 5: Oh...! Him! He is a bloody Sabar. A thief.

Actor 2: No, sir. Please do not say so... He is not a thief...sir. He has not committed any theft. He makes baskets and sells them to the Co-operative. He did not commit any theft.

Actor 5: Whether he has or he has not committed a theft, will be decided by the police. Understand?

Actor 2: But sir he is everything for me, my husband. Let me to meet him.

Actor 5: If you wish to meet your husband then do so in the Court, not here. Get out of here.

(The constable pushes Shyamali who screams for Budhan.)

Actor 2: Budhan...Budhan.

(Her screams are heard by Officer Roy who is beating Budhan.)

Actor 3: Who is it? Who is shouting? (He comes out. Shyamali falls at his feet.)

Actor 2: Sir. Sir. Let my husband go. Sir, he has not done any wrong.

Actor 3 (Looking at Shyamali): You? You have come here too.

Actor 2 (Pleadingly): Sir. I beg you to leave my husband. Please sir.

Actor 3: (Officer Roy kicks Shyamali) Leave the police station or you too shall have it.

Actor 2 (Angrily): Kill me. Kill me too. But please let Budhan go. (Shyamali spreads her pallu

in front of Officer Roy). I beg you for the life of my husband.

Actor 3 : This is a police station. Not a temple where alms are given, get lost.

(Officer Roy goes to the imaginary inside room. Shyamali continues to plead.)

Actor 2 : Sir...sir. Leave him...sir. (A constable prevents her from going inside) Budhan, Budhan.

Chorus : The police is thirsty for the blood of the Sabars. Who will make them understand that we, too, are Indians.

Scene 4

This scene takes place in the Barabazaar police station

Actor 5 : Date : 11th February 1998.

(Officer Roy comes to the police station on the morning of 11th February.)

Actor 5 : (Standing at the gate) : Good morning sir.

Actor 3 : Good morning.

(Inside the police station)

Actor 4 : Good morning, sir.

Actor 3 : Good morning. (To the constable). Has he confessed?

Actor 4 : No, sir.

Actor 3 : Hmm...(After pondering for a while, to the constable) Follow me.

Actor 4 : Sir... Should I record yesterday's date as the day of Budhan Sabar's arrest?

Actor 3 : When will you understand? Do you want to become an Inspector or not? Our work is to turn the facts into fiction and fiction into facts, yesterday into today and today into yesterday. After all, for what other purpose are these official papers and records? Show today's date as the day of Budhan Sabar's arrest. And take special care that the serial number is not the regular one. Is that clear?

(The constable nods his head in obedience. Officer Roy and the constable go to the cell where Budhan is gasping like a fish out of water.)

Actor 3 (To the constable) : Wake him up.

(The constable kicks Budhan. Budhan is in agony on being woken up. He asks for water).

Actor 1 : Water...water. Someone....please give me water. (As his throat is parched, Budhan finds it difficult to speak). My...my throat is dry. Please give me some water.

(A faint smile appears on Ashok Roy's face on seeing Budhan's agony.)

Actor 3 : You are feeling thirsty? You want to drink water? (To the constable) Shivalal, bring a bottle of liquor and pour it down his bloody throat. (On hearing liquor being mentioned, Budhan feels scared).

Actor 1 : Sir, sir. I do not drink. Please have mercy on me.

Actor 3 : Great! You are a Sabar and you do not drink!

(Meanwhile, Shivalal brings a bottle of alcohol and gives it to Ashok Roy).

Actor 3 : Open your mouth. (To the constable) Block his nose.

Actor 1 : No...sir... no. (Ashok Roy pours the liquid down Budhan's throat. Not used to drinking alcohol, Budhan begins to cough violently).

Actor 3 : Now, not only you but even your father will have to accept that you committed the theft.

(Once again they beat the half unconscious Budhan with their fists, legs and stick. Budhan cries out in pain. His painstricken cries are heard by Shyamali who is sitting outside the police station, hungry and thirsty. She is terrified. Once again she runs towards the police station but the constable stops her).

Actor 5 (Looking at her sternly) : Aye woman....you are still here?

Actor 2 (Angrily) : I shall not go without meeting my Budhan.

Actor 5 : Will you go or else...(threatens her with his staff).

Actor 2 : (Defies him) Kill me. Kill me along with Budhan. Anyway, what shall I do without him?

Actor 5 : If you wish to die, then drown yourself in the village well. But get out of here! (He pushes Shyamali. Shyamali stops the passersby and entreats them to save her husband). Someone help my husband. These people will kill him. Please help me. Budhan is innocent. He has done

no wrong. (Stopping an imaginary man on the street) Please help me. Those people will kill Budhan. (Budhan's heartrending scream is heard from inside the police station). See...see how mercilessly they are torturing my Budhan. Brother, please help me. We were just eating paan. Is it a crime to eat paan? Budhan...Budhan.

(The actors assume the form of a police station).

Actor 5 : For three days beginning from 10th February to 12th February, Budhan was kept in prison without food and water.

Actor 4 : Budhan was charged with 3rd degree without a remand order. What kind of a law is this?

Actor 7 : On 13th February, Sridhar Sabar, another Sabar youth is brought to the Barabazaar police station.

Scene 5

(This scene is located in the Barabazaar police station. A constable shoves Sridhar Sabar into the prison cell).

Actor 5 : (Pulling Sridhar by the collar) Go inside. A bloody Sabar who steals. (Locks Sridhar in the cell).

Actor 7 : Sir... Please let me go, sir... Some expense...

Actor 5 : Shut up. (Locks the door of the cell. Budhan is locked in the opposite cell. He is lying unconscious and in a delirious state, is repeatedly begging for life in a delirious state).

Actor 1 (in a broken voice) : Sir, please leave me. I will die, sir.

Actor 3 : These Sabars are very hard to crack. Seems he will not give in so easily. We will have to use third degree on him. (To the guard) Make arrangements for giving him electric shocks.

Actor 6 : But sir... he may die.

Actor 3 : (Looking sternly) You do as you are told. Its an order.

(The guard begins to carry out Officer Roy's instructions. He makes Budhan sit on his knees and ties his hands at the back. He ties the electric belt on Budhan's head and puts on the machine. Budhan begins to tremble. His eyes roll. Saliva drips from his mouth. Budhan is given electric shocks three times. Sridhar looks on from the other cell. His eyes fill with tears. Though he wants to help Budhan, he cannot do so.)

Actor 5 : The Court has ordered that Budhan be taken into remand from 13th February to 16th February.

Actor 7 : The legal system that is both blind and deaf, did not take into account that Budhan had already been taken into remand.

Actor 4 : The Deputy Commissioner and the Superintendent of Police carried out a search at Budhan's home but they failed to find anything but poverty.

Actor 3 : On 13th February, the Court releases Sridhar Sabar on bail and he is taken to the Purulia jail.

Actor 1 : After three days of remand the Court decides to punish Budhan and he, too, is taken to the Purulia jail.

Actor 6 : Budhan is shifted to the Purulia jail after sunset, which is against the set procedures.

Scene 6

(The actors take the form of Purulia jail. The assistant superintendent is taking the attendance. Sridhar is also present among the prisoners).

Actor 4 : Sridhar.

Actor 7 : Yes, sir.

(The superintendent marks his presence).

Actor 4 : Hm...Kanji.

Actor 3 : Yes, sir.

(The Superintendent marks his presence in the register. During this time a guard gently and slowly brings Budhan to the place where the roll call is taking place. He has been brutally beaten and is unable to walk.)

Actor 6 : (To the Superintendent) : Sir, he is a Sabar. He was brought here yesterday evening from the Barabazaar police station.

(On hearing the name 'Sabar', the Superintendent's face fills with hatred).

Actor 4 : Hm...search him.

(The guard searches Budhan but does not find anything).

Actor 6 : There is nothing, sir.

Actor 4 : Okay. Make him sit there and continue with your work.

Actor 6 : But sir, it seems he has been severely beaten and injured. He is even unable to walk steadily and has even not been medically examined yet.

Actor 4 : (showing indifference) Yes, Okay. Help him to sit and then you may go.

(The guard helps Budhan in a sitting position and goes away.)

Actor 4 (To Budhan) : Aye, you. What is your name? (There is no answer from Budhan. Budhan is not in a state to speak. The Superintendent is furious on not receiving a reply from Budhan. In a raised voice).

Actor 4 : I said, what is your name?

(There is no response from Budhan. The Superintendent is now fuming with anger. He goes near Budhan and shakes him). You bastard! Can't you listen? I am asking you something. What is your name? (Budhan stirs as if disturbed from sleep. He is in a state of trauma. He is unable to understand what is happening to him. Frightened, he replies with a great difficulty).

Actor 1 : B.u...dhan.....Budhan Sabar...

Actor 4 : I'm...Budhan...Budhan Sabar...

(Marks Budhan's presence in the attendance register) What is your wife's name?

(There is again no response from Budhan. The Superintendent raises his voice). What is your wife's name?

Actor 1 (Scared) : Shyamali.

Actor 4 : Any children?

Actor 1 : Budhan.

Actor 4 : (The Superintendent notes something in the register and then). Hmm. Okay. Sridhar, you be the sentry for gate no 1 after serving lunch.

Actor 7 : Yes, sir. (He goes away).

Actor 4 : Kanji, you clean the toilets.

Actor 3 : Yes, sir. (He too goes away. Sridhar and Kanji are seen to be busy with their work in the rear part of the stage.)

Actor 4 : (To Budhan) And you..Budhan Sabar...You will broom the entire prison. Understood?

(After giving orders, the Superintendent walks away on his daily round of inspection. Budhan is badly injured. He gets up with great difficulty and takes the broom in his hand. But because of the severe pain in his body, he is unable to move and sits on one side. On seeing him sit, the guard shouts at him).

Actor 6 : Aye...what are you doing? Why aren't you working?
(The Superintendent arrives).

Actor 4 : What is happening?

Actor 6 : Sir...He is not working.

Actor 4 : These bloody Sabars...they are scoundrels. They will never do an honest work and will live by thieving alone. (Catches hold of Budhan and pushes his face on the floor). Thrash him so that he gives up being a parasite. (The guard and the Superintendent beat Budhan mercilessly. His bones are broken. He can no longer even moan but the guard and Superintendent continue to beat him like an animal. After they finish with him).

Actor 4 : Lock the rascal in a dark cell where not even a single ray of light enter. Let him yearn for light. Only then this Sabar will realise the value of hard work.

Scene 7

(The guard calls the other prisoners who are working in the rear and they together dump the half unconscious Budhan in a dark cell. Budhan lies there unconscious for sometime. Sridhar enters the cell to give milk to Budhan. The cell is pitch dark and Sridhar who is having difficulty in finding Budhan, calls his name).

Actor 7 : Budhan...Budh...an. It is so dark here. One cannot even see properly. (Places his hands over his eyes). Budhan...oh Budhan...please make some sound. Where are you?

(Sridhar slowly makes his way forward in the dark. Budhan is lying in a semi-conscious state in a corner of the cell. Sridhar's feet come in contact with Budhan. Suddenly, Budhan wakes up, as if from a deep and painful sleep and screams as if someone has inflicted fresh injury on his wounds).

Actor 1 : (As Sridhar touches him). Don't hit me. Please don't hurt me. I have not done anything, sir. I am innocent. Please don't beat me. I have not committed any theft...Oh! I have not committed any theft...ah! (Budhan writhes in pain as if someone is beating him mercilessly.

Sridhar tries to soothe him).

Actor 7 : Budhan...Budhan...Budhan...I am Sridhar, your friend. (Holding Budhan) You haven't recognised me. Look at me. I am Sridhar.

(On hearing Jidhar's name, Budhan quietens down. He slowly tries to gain control of himself. He narrows his eyes and looks at Sridhar. He takes Sridhar's face in his hands. Once he is sure that it is Sridhar besides him, Budhan begins to cry uncontrollably.)

Actor 1 : Sridhar...Sridhar, please save me Sridhar. These people beat me mercilessly. Sridhar, I have not done anything. I...I am innocent...I have not stolen anything..You...you know me. I simply make baskets. Sridhar, I beg you, please save me...or...or these people will kill me...Sridhar.

(On seeing Budhan break down, Sridhar is deeply moved).

Actor 7 (Trying to console Budhan) : Budhan...please do not feel scared...Everything will be okay.

Actor 1 : (Sobbing) Sridhar... I am innocent...Believe me...I am innocent.

Actor 7 : I know, my friend. You have not done any wrong. But we belong to the Sabar community. We poor tribals can do nothing to these butchers. But...you do not lose heart my friend (holding Budhan's face in his hands). Nothing will happen to you. I am there with you, my friend. Nothing will happen to you. (Picking up the glass). Drink this milk.

(Budhan refuses to drink the milk).

Actor 7 : Please drink it Budhan. You have not eaten anything in the past few days. (Brings the glass to Budhan's lips). Budhan drinks the milk. As soon as Sridhar moves to leave, Budhan clutches his legs.)

Actor 1 : Please don't leave me...don't go away Sridhar. I feel very frightened here. These people will kill me. Sridhar...please don't leave me.

(Unwillingly, Sridhar frees himself from Budhan's grip and picking the glass).

Actor 7 : Please do not worry Budhan. No harm will come to you. Nothing will happen. (Thus saying, Sridhar goes away. After he leaves, the loneliness of the solitary cell once again gets to Budhan. He is feeling extremely frightened and uneasy. He begins to feel that along with his body, his mind and spirit too have been deeply wounded. His mind is crowded with terrifying thoughts. He has lost control over his body and mind. He feels as if his children are calling out to him in that dark cell.)

A voice in the background : Father...father...bring a bird for me from the market.

A voice in the background : And father bring sweets for me.

(On hearing these voices, which are really inside his mind, Budhan suddenly becomes very restless. All around him, he feels a void. His mind is unsteady. In the backdrop, there is a rhythmic call of 'Budhan...Budhan', which is very frightening. Budhan feels that someone is

calling out for him in that dark cell. He looks around him hysterically. He is disturbed and feels a tremendous physical pain. Four actors, chanting 'Budhan...Budhan', come and surround him. (The four actors can be Officer Roy, Assistant Superintendent, watchman and the constable.)

Suddenly Budhan writhes in pain. He feels that he is being tormented once again. While Budhan wants to escape from those who want to seize his body and spirit, the four actors terrify him by moving around him like evil spirits.

They frighten Budhan by their chanting like ghosts and go on to chant with a terrifying intensity.

Chorus (Actors 3,4,5,6) :

Budhan is a thief.
Accept your crime.
Beat the scoundrel.
Give him electric shocks.
Drive him mad.
The dark cell.

(Their pitch rises and they move around Budhan in a circle.)

Chorus (Actors 3,4,5,6) :

Budhan is a thief.
Accept your crime.
Beat the scoundrel.
Give him electric shocks.
Drive him mad.
The dark cell.

• (Their pitch rises and they move around Budhan in more rapidly in a circle.)

Chorus (Actors 3,4,5,6) :

Budhan is a thief.
Accept your crime.
Beat the scoundrel.
Give him electric shocks.
Drive him mad.
The dark cell.

(Their pitch rises and they move around Budhan in a frenzied circular movement)

(Suddenly, all become silent. Meanwhile, Budhan is unable to bear this attack on his spirit and he feels that he is losing control of his mind. He feels as if the God of Death has taken the form of these four persons who are slowly trying to tear his heart and bring out his soul.)

Chorus (Actors 3, 4, 5,6) : Reaching out to Budhan's heart with their hands.

Death...death...death.

(Their voice gradually loses its intensity. Budhan can no longer bear the physical torture and

the mental agony. After a heartrending shriek, he falls down dead, suddenly free from everything. Everything is quiet. Silent. Total silence.)

Scene 8

(Budhan is dead. His body is lying in the police station. The Superintendent comes with his colleagues for a medical check up.)

Actor 4 (Entering the dark cell) : Today this Sabar will have to be medically checked. (On seeing Budhan lying on the floor).

Wake up the bloody man.

(One of the prison officers kicks Budhan. There is no reaction from Budhan. The Superintendent tries to make him sit. Budhan gives no response. The Superintendent tries to feel his breath and checks his pulse. He realises that his body is lifeless and is terrified).

Actor 4 : Oh...my God. He is dead.

(All become pale).

Actor 3 : Sir. If anyone comes to know about this, we will be in deep trouble.

Actor 4 : Yes. You are right. But...(Begins to think...after some time). From which police station was he brought here?

Actor 3 : Sir, from the Barabazaar police station.

Actor 4 : I Im... (After pondering for a while, the superintendent moves to the telephone lying in a corner and dials a number. On the other side, Officer Roy is sleeping in the Barabazaar police station. He picks up the receiver).

Actor 3 : Hello...Barabazaar police station. May I help you?

Actor 4 : Hello. I am the Assistant Superintendent of the Purulia jail speaking.

Actor 3 : I Im...yes, sir.

Actor 4 : May I speak to Inspector Roy?

Actor 3 : Speaking.

Actor 4 : Inspector Roy, yesterday, your police station had sent an accused to us. Budhan Sabar.

Actor 3 : Yes. So?

Actor 4 : For your kind information, he is no more.

(On hearing this, Officer Roy suddenly becomes alert. Somewhat worried).

Actor 3 : What are you saying sir?

Actor 4 : Yes. He has probably died because of excess of torture. The torture inflicted may have taken place in your lockup or may be in our cell. We are both in the same situation, like two sides of a coin. We now have to think how we can wriggle out of this.

Actor 3 : (Without any worry and totally at ease) What do you suggest me to do? What we have always done under such circumstances ...Suicide...

Actor 4 : Suicide...(both laugh excitedly). The superintendent puts down the receiver and goes near Budhan's corpse and orders the watchman.

Actor 4 : You...Go to the market quickly and buy a piece of cloth.

Actor 6 : (He brings the cloth. Meanwhile, the others hold Budhan's body vertically. The superintendent ties the cloth around Budhan's neck, thereby making it seem that Budhan has strangled himself to death.)

Actor 4 : Now nobody can say that his death...bring down his body and hand it over to his relatives.

(Budhan's body is taken away).

Scene 9

(Budhan's body is lying on the floor. Shyamali comes running. On seeing Budhan lying dead, she loses her senses and faints. She cannot believe that Budhan is dead).

Actor 2 : Budhan...Budhan. What happened Budhan? Why do you not speak Budhan? See...open your eyes...I am Shyamali...your Shyamali. Look at me Budhan...Speak to me Budhan. Why are you so quiet Budhan...Why don't you talk to me...get up Budhan...you cannot leave me like this...

(On seeing Budhan's still body, Shyamali gives a heartrending shriek and begins to cry inconsolately). Budhan...Budhan, you cannot go away, leaving me alone. Oh...someone wake my Budhan. Oh...wake him up. Budhan...Budhan...Take me with you. I ...Didn't I tell you that these people will kill you. Killed you. They've killed you. They have killed my Budhan...

(Shyamali wails loudly. She beats her chest with her hands. Clutches Budhan's body and wails. Officer Roy and the Assistant Superintendent arrive).

Actor 4 : Aye woman...Your husband strangled himself with a piece of cloth.

Actor 3 : Cremate this body immediately before us. And stop this wailing. Prepare for his cremation immediately. Understood?

(Officer Roy and the Assistant Superintendent leave the house. On seeing them walk away, Shyamali begins to shout like a wounded tigress).

Actor 2 : Cloth! Budhan had no spare piece of cloth with him. Then...Oh.... You will go to hell. May your wives become widows and your children be orphaned. (Calling them) You rascals, come back. You have taken my husband away. (She breaks down. She once again goes near Budhan's body). Budhan...these same people have killed you. I will kill them...Budhan.

(Shyamali is crying. During this time, momentarily named Ashish brings a message from Mahasveta Devi.)

Actor 6 : Shyamali, Mahasveta Devi has said that Budhan's body should not be cremated at any cost. Bury Budhan's body somewhere so that nobody comes to know about it. In order to convince the police, burn Budhan's effigy. Have you understood what I said? And please do not worry. All of us, the Samiti and the villagers along with Mahasveta Devi, will avenge Budhan's death. (The man goes away. Shyamali gets up slowly to the rhythmic chant of 'Budhan...Budhan' in the backdrop. She digs the floor of her own house and, with a heavy heart, buries Budhan. She then lays down on the ground.

On the other side, there is a public demonstration to get justice for Budhan's death).

(A group of demonstrators)

Actor 3 : Budhan did not commit suicide. He was killed.

Actor 4 : Conduct a post mortem.

Actor 5 : The police have killed Budhan.

Actor 6 : Budhan was innocent.

Actor 7 : We want justice...we want justice.

(The demonstrators march in a circle and cry for justice).

All : We want justice.

Actor 3 : Let Budhan's death be investigated. We want...

All : Justice.

Actor 5 : Stop the injustice on Sabars. We want...

All : Justice...We want justice, we want justice.

Actor 3 : The people's voice was heard...

Actor 4 : Justice has finally awakened...

Actor 5 : At last the day has arrived...

Actor 6 : The day of justice...

(The actors assume the form of a court room.)

Actor 7 : Date 21st July 1998. The Calcutta High Court.

Actor 3 (Judge) : Order...order. The Court has heard the appeal of Smt Mahasveta Devi, Advocate Pradip Roy and Justice D. K. Basu in the Budhan murder case. The postmortem reports and the C.I.S.I.'s report prove that Budhan Sabar did not commit suicide. He was killed. The Court orders that all police officers involved in the crime, be suspended. The Court directs the government to pay Rs 1 lakh to the widow of Budhan Sabar, as compensation, and also hands over the detailed investigation of Budhan Sabar's death to the C.B.I.

(After the final Judgement, all actors stand still while Budhan's spirit takes the front stage. Budhan addresses the audience).

Actor 1 : Finally...finally...Tell me, what was my crime? Why was I killed? I...I was only eating a paan. Is even eating a paan, for us... My wife is now a widow...My son is orphaned...What will happen to them now that I am gone...Was...did my crime lay in the fact that I was a 'Sabar'? A DNT!

(As if along with Budhan, the entire community of DNTs is crying. The actors form a semi-circle).

Actor 2 : The same question. Every DNT asks this question. Why are they subjected to such atrocity?

Actor 3 : If a DNT commits a crime, is the punishment death?

Actor 4 : No Bhansali exists born among the DNTs?

Actor 5 : No Harshad Mehta was born among the DNTs.

Actor 6 : No DNT is involved in a fodder scam.

Actor 7 : No DNT is involved in the Bofors scandal.

Actor 2 : Are we second class citizens?

All : Are we second class citizens?

All : Are we second class citizens?

All : Are we second class citizens?

All : Are we second class citizens?

All : Are we second class citizens?

All : Are we second class citizens?

All : We need respect.

All : We need respect.

All : We need respect.

All : We need respect.

They all form a human chain, each actor with a raised hand.

The End

Against all Odds

Kishore Shantabai Kale

The little free time that I had in my childhood was spent playing with girls. There were a lot of girls in the neighbourhood and they were all my friends. I used to play langdi (a game in which one person has to chase others hopping on one foot while the rest of the players run and dodge him in a predefined square area), jivla (seven tiles in which seven flat tiles are stacked in the centre, one group throws a ball or stone to topple the tiles and the other group tries to rebuild the pile while avoiding being caught or hit with the ball by the other group), and many other games. One of our favourite games was a make-believe wedding. Once I dressed up as a bride in a white cotton sari, with coloured threads as the mundavali, the decorative strings that are tied across the forehead and hang on either side of the face of the bride and the groom. Someone had brought haldi, which is used to sprinkle on the bride and the groom, an auspicious rite. Even kumkum and snow was put on my face. The make-believe groom was dressed in tattered pieces of cloth which represented a shawl. We were playing in our farmyard away from the house. There was nobody there that day except us kids - Chhaya, Sanjay, Vinayak and some other children - about a dozen of us. We picked some beans from the plants in the garden and pretended to cook a meal. Someone had smuggled some bhakri out of the house and we ate that with great enjoyment. Then we added realism to the whole thing by filing in a procession like a baraat. A few ghungroos were tied to my feet, and when Vithya started beating rhythm on an empty box, I began to dance with all the others. What a racket we created! There was shouting, singing and the raucous rhythm of the tin box. And in the midst of it all, I danced with abandon and all the girls danced with me. None of us heard aji come into the garden, her voice made us jump out of our skins.

'Kisrya, why weren't you born a girl, damn you?'

The tin drum was suddenly and abruptly silenced, the singing and dancing stopped, and all the kids took off at a run. Aji caught me. She was furious. She picked up her stick and it landed hard on my shoulders. She gave me a few sharp blows before I managed to free myself and ran off at great speed to Mana aji's house. I stayed there all day until aji came at night and enticed me home with sweet words. But as soon as I reached home, Popat mama beat me till I was sore all over. Ajoba said, 'If I see you dancing or playing with girls again, I'll kill you.' None of this, however prevented me from playing with girls again. It was one habit that just could not be beaten out of me.

My load of household chores increased with each passing day. Final exams for class five were around the corner and I had very little time to study. I had chores in the house, the farm, the fields, and I had to attend school. What time remained was used for studies. Sundays were school holidays, but I had to take the cattle out to graze. Sometimes, I had to miss school so that I could look after the cattle. While the cattle grazed, I thought I could study. However, what often happened was that I got engrossed in my books and the cow and buffaloes wandered off and destroyed the crops in a neighbouring field. That meant a scolding and a beating for me. The other herdsmen made fun of me and often forced me to go after their cattle, which they had carelessly allowed to wander far off.

Harvesting time in the fields and my final examinations came together. My chores increased and I was compelled to give them priority over my studies. Soon, however, exams ended and the summer holidays started. I wondered what I could do during the holidays. I wanted to visit Bai at Sonpath, of course. In fact, she was in my thoughts all the time. But Bai did not want me there. Ultimately, Rambha maushi took me to the jalsa party at Barshi. Because of the harvest Jiji could not go with her. I went very reluctantly. At Nerla, my chores were defined and organized. At the jalsa party, on the other hand, I had to run errands not only for the women, but also for all the men who visited the women. I was kept on my feet all the time doing all kinds of things.

'Kisrya, hook up my blouse for me.'

'Kisrya, get the flowers for my hair.'

'Kisrya, have you got my sari pressed?'

'Kisrya, have you collected the money from that man?'

'Ay you monkey, the tea hasn't come yet, just go and see, and get it with you.'

'Kisrya, have you washed the clothes? Otherwise, I'll be in trouble.'

It never ended. People were rude and insulting to me, since a young Kolhati boy obviously could not command any respect from the kind of people who came there. I was a delicate-looking boy and some of the men kissed me. The monotony of the song and dance routine every single evening was terribly boring. And most of all, the sadness and despair of the women behind their laughing facades affected me deeply and made me very depressed. For the women and for me, life seemed to hold no hope of happiness. In fact, their lives were sunk in a deeper darkness than mine.

It was midnight and a special session was being held in one of the rooms. The Chitra-Gulzar party was performing at the session. There were five or six spectators. The girls were dancing and singing, the men were drinking and watching. As the time passed, one of them began beating the rhythm on his glass, one or two threw money at the girls and one of them got up to dance with them. I was standing on one side watching the show. I was tired and very sleepy. But I had to stay awake because sooner or later one of the men would want something or the other. At the moment they were on a high of alcohol, women and money. But soon they ran out of liquor. It was three a.m. when one of them got up, came towards me and said, 'Come on boy, come with me.'

We went in a car to the market. I enjoyed the car ride. The shops were all closed, but one shopkeeper heard the car and opened his door a few inches. He handed over a couple of bottles of alcohol and we went back to the theatre. The baithak went on past five o'clock in

the morning. The men continued drinking. Some of them passed out where they sat. The dancers kept dancing and I rocked on my feet with sleep. Finally, all of them either dozed off or passed out and the dancers thankfully went off to change and sleep. I collected all the empty bottles and glasses and piled them in a corner. The men were oblivious to everything. Most of them wore gold chains with pendants round their neck and rings on their fingers. Their pockets were bulging with cash. One of them was asleep on a piece of paper on which chivda had been kept. I left the room, went off into the main theatre and thankfully went to sleep.

I woke up at nine o'clock that morning, had a bath and carried hot water for the women to bathe. There were two servants at the theatre, but one of them had gone off on an errand to the market and the other was ill. Since it was a Tuesday, the day of the goddess, some of the women, including Rambha maushi, bathed early and went to the temple.

After a while I heard the men getting up. I braced myself for the calls of 'Hey, boy, get me tea, get me water, find my chappals...' that invariably followed as they came to consciousness. But there was a loud shout instead.

'Where is my locker?'

There was panic. The loss of gold jewellery from the body of a spectator was taken very seriously. The theatre owner was summoned. Most of the men suspected me because I was in the room all night and the last to leave. I broke down in fear and cried, 'Saheb, I have not taken your locker.'

I touched their feet. Some one said, 'Call the police,' but another said, 'Arey, Why are you accusing this child. He is innocent. Why would he rob anything?'

The others were not convinced. Fortunately for me, some of the women, who had gone to the temple, returned just then. They heard the commotion and came to see what had happened. A girl named Usha ran into the room and said to the man, 'Your locker and money are with me. Last night, you were drunk and dancing and jumping and the locker and the money fell on the floor. I picked it up for safe keeping.'

Everyone fell silent. The man came up to me, patted my head and said, 'Who are you? Why do you work here?'

I told him and he with his friends, took me out on his car. They bought me new clothes and then dropped me back at the theatre. Rambha maushi was not back yet, and the girls made me promise that I would not let her know about this incident. They said that it would only lead to fights and accusations within the party. So, I kept quiet about the whole thing and Rambha maushi heard nothing about it.

I left that very day for Nerla. On the bus stop I met Babya who worked in another jalsa party. He was always telling me that we should run away together to Mumbai. When he saw me leaving for Nerla, he said, 'Arey Kishy, are you going back to Nerla? Don't go, let's run off to Mumbai, instead. We can earn a lot of money there.' 'I don't want to go to Mumbai, I'm going to my village,' I told him. I wanted to finish my schooling and perhaps become a schoolteacher.

Two days after I reached Nerla, Jiji left for Barshi. My results were due in a couple of days. I missed Bai, but this time she had not even written me a letter. When my results were declared and I had passed, I wrote the good news to Bai but she never wrote back.

The summer came to an end, and school reopened. This year I had money to buy my books

and did not need to ask maushi and Ramesh kaka. This was money I had earned at Barshi. I bought second-hand books for class six and hid the remaining fifty rupees. Ajoba knew I had some money with me.

'Looks like you have brought a lot of money back from Barshi. Give me some to buy a bottle, son.'

But I told him that I had no more money, that I had spent it all on my books. Ajoba, however, was not fooled. He kept a strict eye on me. I used to hide my money under a broken tile up on the roof. One day, I took it down and put it in my school bag since I had a few things to buy. I bought a compass box and a pen and hid the change in the leaves of one of my notebooks. When I reached home, ajoba immediately sent me off to the farm to get some dried cowdung cakes. I hung my schoolbag on a nail and ran off. It was only when I had reached the farm that I remembered I had left the money in the schoolbag. I quickly collected the cakes in a basket and ran all the way home. I took down the school bag and leafed through the notebook. The money was gone. Accusing anyone of taking it would have invited a beating. So, I said nothing, but anger burned in my heart.

In the evening ajoba came back with bottles of liquor. Aji cooked fish and then she sat down to drink, as she occasionally did, with ajoba. I was sitting outside watching them and listening to their conversation. The anger in my heart was turning into rage. Aji asked, 'Daru ku kadase paise laye?' (Where did you get the money to buy this alcohol?)

Before ajoba could answer, I shouted, 'Give my money back. You should be ashamed of yourself. Stealing a child's money. Grandfathers give money to their grandchildren, not steal from them.'

My rage was spilling out and I could not control it. The fifty rupees would have taken care of my school expenses for the whole year. And I had done all kinds of chores and back-breaking work to earn the money at Barshi. Ajoba picked up his stick and charged at me yelling, 'I'll beat you till you die, you vermin. How dare you insult me. Your mother has not left a pot of money here for you. You eat your food and dare to insult us. Get out of here.'

'Give me my money first and I will get out of here,' I retorted. 'Otherwise I warn you, there will be none as bad as me.'

Ajoba hit me with his stick. I ran out of the house and threw a stone at him. I completely forgot that he was my grandfather. I was so consumed with rage. Everyone came out of the house and started yelling at me. Popat mama caught me and started hitting me. I was screamed and shouted at and the entire neighbourhood turned up to see what was going on. Mana aji rescued me from mama's clutches.

'Poor motherless child,' the neighbours whispered to each other. What harm has he done? These people lived on the earnings of his mother and now they treat him like an animal. He works from morning to night. Not a leaf can stir in this house without him. They send him off to the fields at all hours of the day and night, and cosset their own sons like precious sand that will slip out of their hands. Kondr dada has taken this child's money and is beating him on top of it.'

Popat mama yelled at them, 'What are you doing here creating a commotion? We'll solve our own problems without your comments. None of you need interfere.'

Mana aji took me home, consoled me and gave me dinner. But I was so upset I could

hardly eat. I missed Bai. I wished I could go to her. But what was the use of going to Sonepeth? In a few days I would have to return to Nerla. Why didn't my mother let me live with her? Was I not her son? A million tormenting questions raced through my mind and I thought I would go mad.

One of our neighbours, Kantabai, had a car. She often went to Parali in it. I went to her and asked if she would take me to Sonepeth. But she said, 'You have school to attend, Kishya. This is your last year, just gird your loins and get through it. I will take you to Sonepeth in the summer. Anyway, your mother does not want you there for long, so why do you want to go there?'

I sadly returned to Manaaji's house. I knew Kantabai had been fair and honest. I spent the night at Manaaji's and she even agreed to let me stay with her for the rest of the year. My heart felt much lighter. But early in the morning aji came there in tears and said, 'We are sorry Kishya, we have wronged you. Please forgive us and come back home.'

Susheela maushi also came with her, and so I went back with them. What else could I have done? I had neither home, nor parents of my own.

I appeared for and passed my sixth standard exams and joined the seventh. This meant that I had to live at Nerla for only one more year, because the school at Nerla went no further than the seventh. The school had no English teacher, and I could not read or write even abc even though I was in class seven.

A million new fears now haunted me. Who would pay for my education beyond class seven? I would have to go to Karmala or another big town to study further. Ajoba had decided that I need not study any further.

'You have studied up to the seventh and that is enough. More, in fact, than any Kolhati boy. There is no need to study any further. It is not as if you are going to get a job or something. You better learn to work in the fields or join the jalsa party and learn to play the dholak. I can buy you a couple of buffaloes and half a dozen goats,' he often said.

My mother had given up dancing, had run away from life in a jalsa party. And now her own son would play the dholak and make other women dance to his rhythms? The very thought made me sick. Sometimes, I dreamt that Bai had tied ghungroos round her feet and was dancing on stage while I played the dholak. I started up from deep sleep sweating in panic. Then I would spend the rest of the night sleepless with anxiety and despair.

Every parent wishes that his or her child should study, should find a respectable place for himself in society. Then why did my mother not feel the same way? why did she not wish that I be well-educated? What would I be in a few years? A dacoit or a thief? A goatheard? A drummer in a tamasha party? Why doesn't my mother worry about this? Does she never think of what is happening in my life? What is happening to me? My head spun with these thoughts. Once or twice in a year, Bai would send money order for me. That too, would be taken away by ajoba. I had no chappals, I went barefoot to school; my shorts were usually torn at the seat; my mind and heart were bruised and my body tired with the needless chores I had to do everyday.

It occurred to me one day, that it would be an escape from the oppressive drudgery of my daily life, if I went to Sonepeth and told Bai, 'If you are ashamed to tell people that I am your son, then tell them that I am your servant. Let me stay with you and I will do all your work.'

You will have help, you need not feel ashamed of me, and my education will be taken care of.

Then I thought, if she still refuses to let me live with her, I will run away to Mumbai with Babya. I decided to go to Sonpeth the next day, but I had no money for the journey. So, I sold my old class six books and a few chickens from the farm. Without telling anyone, I left for Sonpeth.

When Bai saw me, she looked delighted, but I could sense that her feelings were mixed. Was she, perhaps, not so happy to see me, after all? I wondered. I was afraid that after five or six days she would send me back to Nerla. I could not find the courage to ask Bai to let me stay with her. I didn't know what Nana would say, and everybody was afraid of Nana. No one dared say much to him. Besides, Bai's home was a tin-roofed room with a kitchen inside it and a small cot on one side. So tiny it was that when Nana was home, one had to sit in front of him. Would Nana think I would crowd the room too much if I lived there? The next room housed the flourmill. A large window in the wall connected the two rooms so that Bai could keep an eye on the flourmill and take the money from the clients. She often had to interrupt her cooking to look after the clients at the mill. There was one servant at the flourmill. He belonged to Mothi Ai's (literally, elder mother, which is what I called my step mother) village and had lived with Nana since he was a young lad. We used to call him mama. He lived and ate in the house.

I helped Bai around the house and with the cooking. Nana and Bai were amazed that I could cook a meal. The day before Gudi Padwa, the Indian New Year, Bai started her periods and according to custom, she did not cook or even touch things around the house while menstruating. She was very worried because on Padwa, puranpoli (rotis stuffed with cooked and sweetened paste of gram) had to be made and all the workers in the house and the field were invited to lunch. She did not know who would do the cooking for her. The next day, I woke up at four a.m., had a bath, did the puja and filled fresh water from the tap.

'I'll make bhakri or some pohla (pounded rice) for Nana's breakfast,' I said to Bai and disappeared behind the curtain which separated the kitchen area from the rest of the room. Bai had to stay away from the kitchen and most of the things in the room, so she decided to sit in the flourmill and keep an eye on things there. She had no idea what I was doing in the kitchen. Nana and Deepak were asleep on the bed. All the things needed for the festive meal had already been bought, and I got down to work. I boiled the gram, mashed it, cooked it with sugar and made puranpolis. I also made amti, a thin dal, and set the rice on the fire to cook. By nine o'clock the meal was ready. Mama came in from the mill and moved the curtain aside to see who was cooking. When he saw the meal, he called out, 'Akka, (elder sister - everyone in Sonpeth called Bai akka) come and see, Kishore has made puranpolis.' Bai looked in through the window and was astounded. Neither she nor mama could believe their eyes.

Nana woke up, bathed and asked Bai, 'What's for lunch?'

Bai said, 'Just wait for a few minutes.'

When Nana saw the puranpolis, he asked, 'Who has made these?'

He could not believe that I had cooked the meal. Everybody ate lunch - the washerwoman, the cattle shed cleaner, the woman who washed utensils. I served everybody and then Bai, Deepak and I ate. The next day, the cleaner said to Bai, 'That was a very tasty meal you gave us yesterday. I have never eaten such good amti ever before.'

'My elder son cooked it,' Bai said proudly.

My heart swelled with joy. It was the first time that Bai had publicly called me her son.

At the end of the four days of menstruation, I bathed Bai (women did not bathe during their periods) and helped her wash her hair. Then I gave her a hot meal. I had taken over the responsibility of collecting money from the clients of the flourmill, and sat at the mill keeping an eye on things. Bai depended on me more and more. Nana said to her, 'Doesn't Kishore ever get tired and fed up? You should tell your beloved Deepak to learn something from him. Dear Deepak starts crying at the very thought of work.'

Nana and Bai decided that I should stay on at Sonpeth with them and continue my studies there. My happiness seemed to fill the skies.

When schools reopened, Nana sent a letter to the Nerla school asking them to send my admission and transfer papers to the school at Sonpeth. The Sonpeth school also sent them a letter but the papers never came. Kondiba ajoba had ensured that they would not be sent because he was furious that I was not returning to Nerla. After a fortnight, Nana went personally to Nerla to bring the papers and I joined the senior school at Sonpeth.

'If anyone asks your caste,' Bai told me, 'say you are a Sali, because I am a Sali.'

My admission papers clearly stated that I was a Kolhati, but I had to do what Bai said. Truth always comes out, however, and my little lie lasted only for a few short days. The teachers and students wondered about me and my name:

'He is said to be Krushnarao Wadkar's son. Then, why is his name Kishore Shantabai Kale?' they whispered behind my back. 'Krushnarao Wadkar is of the Sali caste but Kishore's paper says that he is a Kolhati. Then whose son is he?'

Some said that I had no father at all. I was aware of all the speculation about me and, in the beginning, I dreaded going to school. But I soon got used to it.

Nobody at school made friends with me. For days I kept to myself, quietly attending classes and then going home. Finally, two boys, Deepak Lande and Sanjay Lande, started talking to me, but the others teased them and called them names for befriending me, and soon they, too, kept away. I had a lot of trouble with my studies. I knew no English at all, and the rest of the class could read and write the language. Everybody made fun of my pronunciation. I was also slapped by the teacher for my inability to deal with English.

At Nerla I was used to one teacher teaching all the subjects. But at Sonpeth there was a different teacher for every subject. I found this very disconcerting.

I used to study in the flourmill. I had to look after the mill too, and collect the money from the clients and keep accounts. Nana always left home at eight p.m. every evening and returned at four a.m. the next morning. He spent the whole night playing cards at the club, the whole day he slept. He usually woke up at five in the evening and asked for the daily accounts of the flourmill. I always wrote them down very neatly - money collected, money spent and money due. Both the households, Bai's and Mothi Ai's, ran on earnings from the mill.

At school, my English gradually improved as did my speech and behaviour, and I seemed

less of a country bumpkin. But my workload, which had remained the same in the beginning, also changed – for the worse. Though the physical labour was about the same, the mental pressures were much more at Sonpeth.

Nana used to dabble in 'matka' – a kind of illegal lottery. The day he won, he would be full of smiles, but when he lost, all the anger and frustration was poured on us. It was the same when he lost at cards. Then, I was beaten up out of sheer anger and frustration. At Nerla, I had learnt to be stoic about my troubles. But, at Sonpeth, it was very hard to see the pain that Bai had to bear. Nana often went away for three or four days at a stretch. Many people told Bai that he visited a jalsa party. Rambha maushi and other girls from the party even wrote to Bai telling her that Nana was seeing another dancer. But Bai said nothing and bore the pain in silence.

Deepak used to eat bread with his morning tea and this bread was eaten before Nana woke up. Bai would offer us all kinds of food before Nana awoke. It was something I never understood. Why this secrecy from Nana? Why did she have to hide from Nana what we ate in the house? Deepak was a poor eater, and though in class four, he still fed from Bai's breasts. He loved fruits. So Bai sent me to buy fruits everyday. Sometimes I bought mangoes, sometimes dates. It was all done without Nana's knowledge, of course. Deepak ate the fruit I bought, but never offered me a bite. Bai never offered me any, either. I tried not to let it bother me, because I knew that Bai loved Deepak more than me. I was able to complete my education at Sonpeth and for that, I was grateful. I knew that Nana and Bai needed a servant, and that is why I was allowed to stay with them. I understood and accepted why I had been allowed to live at Sonpeth when I was older, and not when I was a child.

I passed my seventh standard examination. Then, we heard that Jiji was ill, so I went to Nerla to see her. I was hardly recognised there! Everyone exclaimed at the change in me, in the way I looked and talked. Old friends and neighbours were delighted to see me; they believed that my years of banishment had ended. Only I knew that my troubles were far from over, that my life would never be easy. I sometimes felt that, perhaps, that death alone would bring me release from my burdens.

When I was leaving for Nerla, Bai and Nana had asked me to look for a good old woman or a young girl who would come and live with us and help Bai in the house. At Nerla, Susheela maushi was so impressed with the change in me that she asked me if I could take her daughter, Jaya, with me. Jaya was then in class three and I thought that she would be the ideal choice for a helper for Bai. She could help around the house and go to school in a bigger town.

Once Jaya came to Sonpeth, my burdens eased a little and I had more time to study. She was admitted to school there and helped Bai around the house. Nana, however, continued his trips to the jalsa parties. He was now out for five days every week. Bai knew exactly what was happening, but could do nothing except worry. What was there to stop Nana from bringing another woman home? She vented all her pent up anxiety and anger on me. Two beautiful wives in the house and Nana still had to find new women at jalsa parties. It's true, a leopard can never change its spots.

Nana returned home after a few days but Bai stopped talking to him. Nana had his meals with Mothi Ai and spent some of his waking hours there, so that he could avoid talking to Bai. A few days later, a jalsa party came to Sonpeth, and again Nana spent his days and nights

there. He had forged a relationship with a dancer named Shalan and spent enormous amounts of money on her. When he ran out of cash, he started selling off things from the house. For days on end, Nana did not sleep at home. I could understand my mother's feelings. She felt uncertain and insecure and afraid that she would be abandoned. She was in the grip of such sorrow and despair that she spent all her time in prayer, oblivious to anything else in the house. With Jaya's help, I did all the cooking.

Finally one day, Bai and Mothi Ai decided that they would go to the jalsa party and confront Nana there. But Mothi Ai was so frightened of Nana that she trembled at the thought of doing battle with him. Although she tried, she could not gather the courage and finally, refused to go to the jalsa party with us.

At eleven p.m. that evening Bai, Jaya and I set off towards the place, where the tamasha was being held. But our neighbours's son saw us and ran ahead to warn Nana. Nana left the tamasha and started off briskly down the lane behind the municipality building. We ran after him, but Nana was faster and he reached home before us. When we entered the room, Nana was in a towering rage.

'Where did you go wandering at this hour of the night? He shouted at Bai. 'You step out of the house at this hour again and I'll break your legs.'

Bai was menstruating then, so Nana started beating up Jaya, yelling, 'How can she be better? She will also be true to her caste.'

Nana beat Jaya until she nearly fainted. Finally, Bai could bear no more and caught Nana by the neck. We were all screaming and wailing. Nana let go off Jaya and started beating Bai. I ran out to get a stone to hit him with, but Nana caught me and beat me severely.

'Children of a tamasha dancer!' Nana shouted. He turned on Jaya again. 'Her mother's arse! Who asked her to intervene in my business?'

Jaya was so frightened, she ran away from the house.

'Like mother like daughter,' said Nana in disgust, watching her disappear down the lane.

Then he turned on us, 'And what is wrong with all of you? Wailing away as if somebody had died in the house?'

Nana picked up the images of the gods from Bai's little puja place and threw them at her. When she was menstruating Bai did not touch anything or anyone in the house, and touching her gods was blasphemous. (It is an orthodox Indian belief that women are unclean when they menstruate, and so for four days they do not touch anything in the house.) But there was Nana throwing them at her. Bai screamed at Nana, 'You first ensure that I have a place and an income to live on before you go off to other women. You begged me to leave the jalsa party and come and live with you here, I did not chase you. You love to taste different flesh every day, but I am not that kind of person. You settle me properly and then go where you like. You promised to buy me fields when you brought me here, but it is twelve years now and you have still not kept your word. I have lived in this horrible shed, worn old and torn saris. You have wheedled all my gold jewellery from me and gambled it away. You have taken everything and now you want me to go? Where do you think I can go? How will I look after my children? Give me an income that will support me, and a proper roof over our heads, and you can keep as many women as you like.' Bai was sobbing loudly.

'I didn't ask to be brought here,' she said, 'Don't ruin me.'

'What do I care?' sneered Nana. 'Go and find another man, you are free to go now. Obviously, I have not satisfied you.'

That was the last straw for Bai. She had been completely faithful to Nana, though he had treated her so badly. She had abandoned her son, severed contact with her family and done everything she could to make him happy. After all that, Nana had so easily told her to simply walk out of his life. Bai charged at him shouting, 'I will not leave you and go anywhere. Even if you die, I will follow you to the cremation ground and boil your bones and eat them. Neither, you nor your ancestors can escape me now. I didn't leave everything behind and come live here with you just to leave at a moment's notice like this. I broke all our social rules, did not give a second thought to my parents, even abandoned my child - and you think I will simply go away now? I spent all my youth with you and now you tell me to go?'

Nana attacked Bai again, more viciously than before. I could have killed Nana, but because of Bai I controlled myself. At 2.30 a.m. that morning Bai ran out of the house. We chased after her. She headed straight for the river and was about to jump in when I caught her sari and pulled her back.

'Why did you give birth to us when you cannot look after us?' I cried.

Nana came and took us back home. If we had not returned to Nana's tin room, where else could we have gone? Even if we had to go away in a fit of rage, society would have accused us of deserting him.

'She was a dancer,' people would have said, 'she must have had some affair, that is why the man had to throw her out.'

We would have been unable to live in Sonpeth. That is why Bai went home quietly.

The very next day Nana went away again. We were all very worried. We knew that he was doing all he could to throw Bai out of his house. But what could we do? Where could we go? Bai met all the influential people of the town, Nanasaheb Jahagirdar, Dattopant Paralkar, even some relatives and friends; but nobody wanted to interfere in the matter. They were all afraid of Nana's temper. Bai could find no solution to her dilemma and she cried all the time.

Nana periodically returned to Sonpeth and beat us black and blue each time he came. I was angry and fed up.

'Strangle us and let us die,' I said to Bai. 'Then you do whatever you want to do. But if you die first, what will happen to us? We will be begging on the streets or robbing or thieving. I am not going to listen to you any more. I am going to kill Nana.' I picked up a stone and started running down the road where Nana had just gone. Bai caught me and said, 'Arey Kishore, don't do that. Kill me if you must, but don't kill him.' After all this, Bai still cared for Nana.

The next day Nana went off again. Shalan's jalsa party left town but Nana did not return for a week. Jaya was miserable and thin with worry and fear. She fought with Bai and shouted at her, but Bai did not react or even answer her. At last, Jaya, wrote to her mother and Susheela maushi came to Sonpeth. The day she arrived there was no food in the house, no kerosene to light the stove. Maushi gave me some money to buy rice and I sat down to cook some khichdi. There was no wood to light the cooking fire and I tried to start up the fire with twigs and wood shavings. It smoked terribly and made my eyes water. I started coughing and maushi came and lit the fire for me. Bai was crying in a corner. She could not do or say anything.

'If I were in your place,' maushi said to her, 'I would have committed suicide by now. Why live like a dog?'

Nana came home that day and asked me to buy some sabudana (sago) and pound it into a powder. Sabudana is not easy to powder and I struggled with it. Susheela maushi watched me and said, 'God is really testing you, isn't He, Kishore? How much is He going to put you through? Even here, living with your mother, your life is no better than a dog's.'

Susheela maushi took Jaya away to Nerla. After she left Bai and I went to Parbhani to visit Ramrao Lonikar, an M.L.A. When Bai was with the jalsa party at Selu, the M.L.A. had accepted her as his foster sister. Nagin maushi, then a sixteen year-old dancer, had captivated Lonikar and he had brought her away from the tamasha. He had set her up in a house of her own. Down the years, Nagin maushi had been treated with respect and affection, and she now had three sons and a daughter. Bai and Nagin maushi were good friends. We poured out all our troubles to Nagin maushi, hoping that her sympathy would influence Lonikar who would then somehow help us.

When we got home, we found Deepak sitting alone in the room looking forlorn and miserable. Tears ran down his face, but he did not say a word to us. Nana was nowhere to be seen. Bai took off Deepak's shirt to give him a bath and almost recoiled from the sight of his back. It was black and blue and there were weals all over, the skin had peeled off in some places. In other places, there were dark splotches of congealed blood. Neighbours, who had heard us come into the house, called Bai and told her, 'Nana beat him up like an animal. This poor child was rolling on the floor with pain but the man kept on hitting him. Even when Deepak ran out of the house, Nana chased him and thrashed him as if he were an animal. Many people saw what was happening but nobody went to the poor child's rescue.'

Deepak could not say a word. Silent tears ran down his cheeks and Bai and I wept with him.

Nana returned on a Monday. Bai did not say a word to him because she wanted no acrimony on a Monday. Monday was her day of fasting and she used to ritually wash Nana's feet in a thali (a steel or brass plate) with water from the Ganga, then wipe them, apply haldi and kumkum, wash them again and drink the water. When Nana sat on the bed, Bai brought the thali and the lota (a small brass urn used for water) and placed it at his feet. Nana kicked the water over, much to Bai's horror, and Bai and he had a big fight again. Nana stomped off to the sitting room in the other part of the house to sleep. It was summer and Bai's room was unbearably hot. But she was unaware of the heat; she sat in front of her gods crying and asking, 'What should I do now? What will become of me? Where will I go?'

As if in reply, Nana came rushing into the room, 'Snake! Snake! There is a cobra in the sitting room with its hood spread out ready to strike. It twice struck at a piece of paper lying near my head.'

Bai rushed into the sitting room and saw the cobra with its raised head and hood. The cobra is symbolic of Lord Shiva, who wears one around his neck, and Monday is Shiva's day. Bai fasted and prayed to Shiva every Monday. She folded her hands and gently bowed before the snake in the sitting room. The snake lowered its hood. By then, Narayan mama had brought the snake charmer who caught the snake and took it away. But the story spread like wildfire throughout the neighbourhood. People were wonderstruck, especially those who had seen the deadly serpent. Nana was very subdued. He was now convinced that if he were not good to

Bai, the gods would punish him. It was Bai's prayers that Shiva himself had answered in the guise of the snake, Nana believed. Never again did he hit Bai. What's more he stopped going to tamashas and visiting other dancers.

Nana had incurred an enormous debt due to gambling at cards. He decided to sell one of his fields, repay the debt and use the rest of the money to buy another piece of land. The money from the sale of the field was lying in the cupboard when the dates for the municipal elections were announced. Nana was a member of the Municipal Council but had done no work at all. He knew that people were angry with him and would not re-elect him. However, Bai and I set out to work as hard as we could for him - campaigning for him all over his constituency (the area which he hoped to represent in the council), and I spent hours every night painting election slogans on public walls. None of Nana's other relatives came forward to help. Well-known leaders like ex-MLA Uttamrao Vitekar, Shivaji Mahajan and others, visited Nana's constituency and distributed jowar to the people in exchange for promises of votes; but Nana did not visit his own ward even once because he was convinced that he would lose. The elections ended and counting began. Bai sat before her gods and prayed. Nana's opponent Vishwanath Bansode, the BJP candidate polled an identical number of votes. It was decided that a toss of coin would decide who would be the winner. Nana won. Hundreds of people came rushing to our house with the good news. Nana felt that it was only Bai's prayers that had brought him this good luck. He garlanded Bai with the first garland of flowers that was brought for him.

'It was because of you that I won,' he said to her. 'You have helped me hold my head high in society.'

The money in the cupboard had been freely used during the campaign, and it was nearly all over. Bai kept telling Nana that he should buy land as soon as possible, before all the money vanished.

'Buy it on your name,' she urged him. 'It does not have to be on my name. Take whatever of my jewellery is left, if you need to.'

A piece of prime land belonging to one Deshmukh came up for sale. Many people in the town were interested in this land, but Bai met Deshmukh's aunt and told her all her problems. As a result, Shripadrao Deshmukh promised Bai that he would sell the land to her and no one else. Nana bought six acres of land on my name and six on Bai's. All these years Nana had been afraid that we would simply leave any day, but after the snake incident and then the elections victory, he finally felt convinced that he could trust us.

Excerpt from *Kolhatyace Por*, translated into English by Sandhya Pandey

Police Officer disowns Plagiarism Charges

The readers may recall that we had published in the last issue of Budhan (April-June, July-Sept., 2000) correspondence relating the instance of plagiarism of materials from Budhan by Dr. Giriraj Shah, IPS. Following are more letters related to the case.

To : Dr Giriraj Shah, IPS, Century Pulp and Paper, Lalkua 262 402, District Nainital, Uttaranchal
From : Smt Mahasveta Devi, 18 A Ballygunge Station Road, Calcutta 700 019

Dear Dr. Shah,

This letter is in reference to 1. A. Garg's letter No. GBP/AF/47/2000 dt. 04.12.2000; 2. Your letter dt. 29.11.2000; 3. Dr. G. N. Devy's letter to you No. DNT/2000/43; dt. 08.12.2000
Sir,

Dr. G. N. Devy had already written to your publishers (after receiving your Ms.) that "the material contained in it was mostly plagiarised." I did not have the chance of going through your manuscript. I am sending, for your eyes, excerpts from your book and article published in *Budhan*, written by Dr. G. N. Devy. I will send you another letter after I check your Ms. and other plagiarisations from *Budhan*. Not only I will not write a foreword, I have no course left but writing to the media about this. It is heart breaking to find that a man of your stature, with fellowships from such august institutions, could plagiarise with such candour and go to publish a book as original. For your clarification :- 1. The Denotified & Nomadic Tribes Rights Action Group was founded in March 1998; 2. Its newsletter Budhan started from April 1998; 3. The Secretary of DNT-RAG and editor of Budhan is Dr. G. N. Devy.

What more can I say? The entire episode is really very unsavoury.

Copy to: Shri B. P. Garg, Gyan Publishing House, 5 Ansari Road, Daryaganj, New Delhi and Dr G. N. Devy, 6 United Avenue, Near Dinesh Mill, Baroda 390 007.

To : Smt Mahasveta Devi, 18 A Ballygunge Station Road, Calcutta; From : Dr Giriraj Shah, IPS, Century Pulp and Paper, Lalkua 262 402, District Nainital, Uttaranchal, Dated 21.12.2000
Madam,

I am just now in receipt of your kind letter through courier. I am grateful for the same and first of all apologise to your august personality if I have hurt your feelings in anyway and submit following for your kind consideration :

i) The MSS submitted to you was compiled by the publisher through his team of researchers/scholars; ii) The publisher has only put my name there, however, certain chapters were

prepared by me and few others edited; iii) As regards plagiarism, the publisher has already submitted his explanation, without informing me about your letter, though I enquired about any response from you, from time to time; iv) As regards excerpts quoted as plagiarised from Budhan, I am not aware about any such article or magazine, however, I borrowed it from some newspaper (probably Times of India has carried it) and have acknowledged it. However, I beg your apologies and of Dr. G. N. Devy, if I have hurt in any way. And I assure you that I withdrew my name from the book/as its editor.; v) Nowhere, I have emphasised or claimed it as original. I have only edited it on fact and language basis and since you have kindly pointed out my faults, I withdraw my editorship.

Yes, I feel sad that I associated my name with such a work which was brainchild of my publisher, who kept me in dark. In fact, I am grateful to you for pointing out the glaring instance. I hope that is the end of the matter and chapter is closed.

Copy to : Shri B. P. Garg, Gyan Publishing House, 5 Ansari Road, Daryaganj, New Delhi.

To : Dr G. N. Devy, Secretary, Denotified & Nomadic Tribes Rights Action Group, 6 United Avenue, Near Dinesh Mill, Vadodara 390 007; From : Shri B. P. Garg, Managing Director, Gyan Publishing House, 5 Ansari Road, New Delhi 110 002, dated 17.01.2001

Respected Sir,

In reference to our previous correspondence and the latest telephonic conversation, I am hereby submitting the following facts :

1. The book Denotified Communities of India is supposed to be a compilation of material carried out by a team of professionals; 2. At the moment this is only a collection of material in raw form and not a book in its final shape; 3. This material is bound to be edited, checked, verified, improved and edited thoroughly by experts at our level, before being shaped into a compiled and edited volume; 4. This material is lying with you, in its present form; 5. We earnestly desire that this material is perused and vetted by you, before being given for further process of compilation; 6. We also desire to bring this book out under your esteemed editorship, once you approve the stuff, to be utilized; 7. It is also to be stated clearly that the whole material has been taken from records, documents, and old books, keeping the copyright issue in mind. The matter has been updated and supported by reference from the people of India series of Anthropological Survey of India.

In the light of the above facts, I now request you to kindly go through the material lying with you and approve it - on merit alone - for publication and please also grant permission to get it published under your name as Editor. In fact, we intend to publish a good, authentic and comprehensive book on the above stated subject. We solicit all encouragement and co-operation from a scholar of high calibre like you. May I also take liberty to assert that yours and ours mission is same. So, it is high time for us to join hands. Now I look forward to your visit to Delhi and our office in February 2001. Please bring the material in question with you, for a final discussion and a possible co-ordination. Expecting an early, favourable response from your end.

Justice

Mahasveta Devi

15-2-2001. Yesterday was a good day, because Honourable Justice Ruma Pal's verdict in Budhan Sabar's case entered the last chapter.

Budhan Sabar's case is known by the readers of DNT RAG journal *Budhan*. *Budhan* was picked up by Ashok Roy, O.C. Barabazar P. S., on 10-2-98. Till 12-2-98 he was kept in the P. S. lock up, denied food and water and tortured. On 12-2-98, Barabazar O.C. produced him at Purulia court and took him back for further enquiries. On 16-2-98 he was sent to Purulia jail. Further torture followed. On 17-2-98 evening it was said that Budhan committed suicide by hanging.

A writ petition was submitted to the Honourable Chief Justice of Calcutta, the writ petition No. 3715 (W) of 1998 / Paschim Banga Kheria Sabar Samiti vs the State of West Bengal and others. Within 6 months Honourable Justice Ruma Pal concluded the case and gave her verdict. She was satisfied that the cause of the death of Budhan was not a case of suicide, and C.B.I. was directed to investigate the cause of Budhan's death and bring the offenders to book. A sum of rupees one lakh (1,00,000) was to be given to Budhan's widow and his parents (this money was paid in two instalments, 15,000 & 85,000). The I.G. of police was directed to start departmental proceedings against Ashok Roy, the Purulia jail superintendend and a jail warden.

The Samity felt that departmental proceedings and C.B.I. enquiry as well as action should not be delayed.

The C.B.I. enquiry was completed and submitted to the State Government for sanction to proceed. Till then we knew that sanction by the state government was mandatory. We knew that the C.B.I. had conducted a thorough investigation and submitted the report by mid-2000. By August 2000, I, as the representative of the PBKSKS wrote to the Home Secretary and demanded to know the cause of delay in sanctioning the C.B.I. to proceed.

Then I received the following letter from Shri T. K. Roy, Dy. Secretary to the government of West Bengal To Smt. Mahasveta Devi, No. 4545-PL/PF/155-247/98, dated 15-9-2000, Subject: Writ petition No. 3715 (W) of 1998 Paschim Banga Kheria Sabar Kalyan Samity vs The state of West Bengal and others.

Respected Madam,

I am directed to refer to your letter dated 31-8-2000 on the above subject and to say that the matter is subjudice due to an appeal pending before the Honourable High Court.

Expeditious steps are being taken by us to get the appeal heard and disposed by the Honourable Court.

Yours faithfully, (Sd. T. K. Roy), Deputy Secretary, Home Department, Police Branch.

I wrote to the above authority demanding to know (1) the date of the appeal, and (2) the negligence to the State Government, in executing the directions of Honourable Justice Ruma Pal. It should be mentioned that the Honourable Justice also wrote that "The concerned department of the State Government is directed to ensure that postmortems are carried out by Autopsy Surgeons themselves and issue and circulate necessary directives within 8 weeks of the date of communication of this judgement by publication or otherwise to all government hospitals." My letter might have been strongly worded. I believe it was, as I know myself. Then came the reply.

Government of West Bengal, Home Department, Police

From: Shri T. K. Roy, Dy. Secretary to the Government of West Bengal, To Smt. Mahasveta Devi, No. 4895-PI./PI./455-247/99, Dated 8-11-2000, Subject: Write petition No.3715 (W) of 1998 - PBKSKS vs State of West Bengal and others.

Respected Madam,

I am directed to refer to your letter dated 18-10-2000 on the above subject and to furnish the information as required:

1. Appeal in this matter (MAT No. 3295/98) was filed by the State Government on September 16, 1998.

2. Sanction for persecution of the accused persons along with the report as contained in the letter (No.2093/R.C.4/SCB/98-Cal, dated 25-5-2000) of the superintendent of Police, CBI : SCB : Calcutta, was received by this State Government on 12-6-2000. Hence your contention made in the paragraph 3 of your letter under reference is not correct.

3. The matter regarding giving sanction to CBI is subjudice in an appeal before the Division Bench of Calcutta High Court (MAT 3295/98) filed by the State Government against the order dated 6-7-98 of Honourable High Court. However, all other orders of the Honourable High Court, for example, to initiate departmental action against the accused Police Officers, to award compensation Rupees one lakh (Rs. 15,000 at the initial state plus Rs. 85,000 later as per orders of the Honourable High Court) to the widow of the deceased (Budhan Sabar) to carry out Post Mortem by Autopsy Surgeons and issue necessary directions in this regard as per orders, have been fully complied with by the state government.

Yours faithfully, (sd. T. K. Roy), Deputy Secretary

The counsel representing state government continued to delay the hearing but Pradip Roy. The *amicus curaei* made efforts).

An appeal was preferred by the State Government against the order of CBI investigation.

The appeal came up for hearing before Honourable Chief Justice Ashok Kumar Mathur and Justice Girish Chandra Gupta on 14-3-2001. The appeal preferred by the state government has been dismissed by the Division bench as the appeal became infructuous. Pradip Roy, *amicus curaei* pointed out that though CBI submitted the chargesheet on 12-6-2000, prosecution of state government officials could not be started due to the above mentioned appeal by the state

government. He pointed out that no such sanction is required when the High Court directs the CBI for investigation. Justice was delayed because of the appeal of the state government. The same contention regarding sanction was also conceded by Balai Roy, Senior counsel appearing for the state government.

Now the judgement of Honourable Justice Ruma Pal will be fully honoured. Chargesheet will be submitted against the State Government officials in the high court very soon and the offenders will face trial.

It has been a long battle won by sheer tenacity of the Paschim Banga Kheria Sabar Kalyan Samiti.

SUBSCRIBE AND READ *BUDHAN*
THINK AND ACT FOR REMOVING THE STIGMA

2. Next, grant the participants the accused parents' story, and the opportunity to

HELP THE DENOTIFIED COMMUNITIES

HELP THE DENTIFIED COMMUNITIES

THEY ARE HUMAN

THEY ARE HUMAN

